

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

4-1.0: FAITH & DELIVERANCE

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4-10: FAITH & DELIVERANCE

Professor Hebro locates a collection of art by Thal N'Krey but it is owned by a cult that worships the ancient Sith. Others have this information though and when Rylee buys it as well the Udras find themselves in a race to find a way to get to the collection that the current owners do not want to relinquish.

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1.

“Professor Hebro.” Jedi Knight Jayk Udra said as he walked up to Dahlis Hebro in the main reception area of the Jedi temple. The university professor had become a regular visitor to the temple over the last few years and each time it had been to see Jayk.

“Jayk.” Dahlis replied as the two men shook hands and Jayk indicated for Dahlis to accompany him to one of the many nearby visitors' suites where they could talk privately.

“I take it that you have another lead on Thal N'Krey.” Jayk said, referring to the missing kiffar artist whose works included imagery of restricted Sith knowledge. More disturbing than this though were the genuine Sith artefacts that the artist had somehow acquired and after his disappearance had become mixed in with his work and sold across the galaxy. Jayk and his padawan Brae Udra, who unusually for the Jedi Order was also his daughter, had been assigned to locate the artist as well as any of his work that contained forbidden material.

“Well I may have located a collection of his work.” Dahlis replied as the two men entered a private office and as he sat down he took out a datapad and turned it on, “I came across the report of a sale of a painting entitled 'Glorious Pyramid' that had Thal N'Krey listed as the creator.” he continued and he handed his datapad to Jayk so that the Jedi could see the image displayed on it.

“A pyramid in a jungle.” Jayk commented and Dahlis nodded.

“Yes. If you zoom in on the balcony then you'll see that there are figures on it that could be Sith themselves but it's not this painting in particular that is of interest. I know you'll want to inspect it anyway but the owners may not be terribly co-operative.” Dahlis said.

“What makes you think that professor?” Jayk asked.

“Because they're Sith.” Dahlis answered and Jayk suddenly looked up at him, “Not literal Sith of course, isolated efforts to re-establish their order aside I know they are extinct.”

“Then what do you mean professor?” Jayk said.

“The painting was purchased at auction two days ago on behalf of a group calling themselves the 'Children of Korriban.' I had to look up the meaning of the word Korriban and found out that it was an old name for the planet currently known in Republic files as Moraband, the homeworld of the Sith species.” Dahlis said.

Jayk frowned. At one time there had been a total prohibition across the Republic on any item, knowledge or practices associated with the Sith but in the years following the Ruusan Reforms lawyers had successfully argued that the Republic's new secular structure and constitution did not permit such limitations on religious practice. Now while the dangerous aspects of Sith lore could still be seized and destroyed by the Jedi Order individuals were free to possess more mundane items and also to proclaim themselves to be Sith if they so wished just as long as their actions remained lawful. Few beings ever claimed a belief the philosophy of the Sith given that the destruction they had brought to the galaxy was a matter of history but there were always certain misguided or just contrarian beings who claimed otherwise and groups of such beings would sometimes get together to form churches dedicated to the Sith.

“Disturbing.” he said.

“It goes further. I reached out to some colleagues in a neighbouring sector and asked them to look into art trades involving the Children of Korriban and they found a pattern of purchases and imports going back decades, sometimes direct and sometimes operating through intermediaries as happened with this most recent acquisition. Worryingly I also found evidence to suggest that they own several pieces of work by Thal N'Krey.”

“They know about him.” Jayk said and Dahlis nodded.

“That was my conclusion as well. Who knows how much of his work they have been able to collect?” he said.

“Thank you for bringing this to my attention professor. I will inform the council at once.” Jayk told him and he got to his feet.

“Actually I was thinking that I might be able to help you.” Dahlis said and Jayk paused.

“How?” he asked.

“Well I don't think that a cult dedicated to revering the Sith will be willing to co-operate with a Jedi such as yourself. On the other hand any religious order may see the benefit in allowing an academic such as myself to study their art collection if there is the possibility of getting some free publicity out of it.” Dahlis pointed out and Jayk considered this for a few moments.

“I will take your offer to the council.” he said, nodding, “The final decision will be theirs. In the mean time I believe that Tylo is aboard the *Swift Exit* in the temple hangar, perhaps you would like to visit him.”

The sound of her communication system activating woke Rylee from her sleep and the woman reached for a robe to put on before she got out of bed and stepped into the scanning field of the holonet transceiver.

"Yes?" she said before a three dimensional image of a large, spiderlike creature appeared in front of her. Rylee immediately recognised this as the Assembler, a name that apparently applied both to the individual itself and also to its somewhat rare species, "Assembler. This is a surprise" she added.

"I have information Rylee." the Assembler replied, "It is time critical and of great importance."

The Assembler acted as an infomerchant, supplying information of a discrete nature to those who could pay. Beings such as him specialised in information that others wanted to keep secret and the price depended on just how secret or obscure it was. The creature had provided Rylee with a number of good leads in her quest to obtain Sith artefacts from around the galaxy and the price he had charged was proportionate to how good his information had been. Thankfully to Rylee money was not a problem.

"How much?" she asked.

"Five hundred thousand credits." the Assembler answered. Even for him this was a lot of money and Rylee hesitated.

"What do I get for this?" she said.

"Details of a large cache of Sith related artwork including pieces allegedly by Thal N'Krey as well as several genuine artefacts. You should be aware that the Jedi Order likely also knows about some of this information already." the Assembler told her.

"Some?" Rylee commented.

"Given the connection between Professor Dahlis Hebro and the Jedi Order, I have been monitoring the professor's communications. He has recently made some enquires about a group that has been gathering items related to the Sith. Not unlike yourself and your associates that I shall not name." the Assembler explained and for a moment Rylee wondered whether this was some sort of threat. He obviously knew far more about her and her reasons for collecting Sith artefacts than she knew about him but she said nothing as he continued, "Obviously I followed up this lead and did some investigating of my own. My skills are far superior to the professors and I have confirmed that the collection includes much more than he is aware of. I also know that twenty minutes ago the professor entered the Jedi Temple."

"Okay I'll pay. Send me the information." Rylee said, nodding. The word of the Assembler was good enough for her to be willing to part with the money before seeing any of the information and her promise of payment was good enough for the Assembler to immediately open up a data channel in parallel with the one they were communicating over, causing a stream of text and images to appear in front of Rylee.

"Stang." she said softly, "You weren't kidding about the size of the collection. The Children of Korriban?"

"Yes, a religious order that among those who claim to be honouring the original Sith culture. Their practices are far removed from the original of course, as so many of these groups are." the Assembler replied.

"Most are. They'd rather pretend that the Sith didn't go around killing anyone who got in their way and sacrificing even more in pointless ceremonies." Rylee said.

"I have included information about the cult itself in the data packet. This is at no extra charge." the Assembler said and Rylee nodded.

"Thanks." she said, "I need to go through this now. The money will be in the usual account within the hour."

"I shall be watching for it" the Assembler said and then his image abruptly vanished into thin air.

The data packet continued to be displayed to Rylee and she knew that the amount of information was too great for her to go through in detail before the Jedi responded. With this in mind as soon as she had made the agreed payment to the Assembler she reached for the controls to the holonet communicator and opened another channel.

"Rylee?" the face of the man whose image appeared in front of her said. Rylee had been using the services of Morton Crayne and his criminal gang to gather objects considered to be artwork by Thal N'Krey for several years now so that she could sift through it and sort out anything that was a genuine Sith artefact that had been misidentified or actual artwork that nevertheless included references to Sith teachings or science that were still prohibited. Unfortunately while Morton's service to Rylee had started out strong the unexpected involvement of the Jedi Order had created a significant reversal in his fortunes and this included limiting the communication technology available to him and unlike the Assembler his image was purely two dimensional, "You're looking good." he added as a smile spread across his face.

Rylee suddenly remembered that she was still wearing a robe and she reached up to tighten it around her.

"Morton I have a job for you. How soon can you have a team ready?" she said.

"Right down to business I see." Morton replied as the smile disappeared.

"A business relationship is the only one we have and let's not forget you owe me Morton. For what you lost and for getting you out of prison. The good news is that if you pull this off then financially speaking we'll be even. Now how soon can you be ready?" Rylee said.

"I've managed to recruit a dozen good men and we have a couple of serviceable transports. One is a gunship that is old but serviceable. The other is just a lightly armed freighter though, so-" Morton began.

"You'll be stealing from religious nuts, not battling a Judicial Department task force." Rylee interrupted,

"Although you will have to watch out for the Jedi. They know about the target and they may already be on

their way. Fortunately my intelligence is better than theirs.” she told him.

“Ah beauty and brains.” Morton commented, smiling again, “But in that case we can leave now. Just send me what you have and I’ll take a look at it.”

“I’m forwarding you the manifest and location details now.” Rylee said, using her communication system to extract the summary of all the items known to have been collected by the Children of Korriban as well as details on the cult itself that the Assembler had helpfully provided as part of the data packet.

“Okay, I’ve got it.” Morton said, nodding his head, “I’ll get back to you when there’s news.” and then Rylee shut off the holonet link and went back to bed.

“So are we going chasing after these nerf herders who think the Sith were all cute and cuddly or not?” Tylo Kurrast, the owner of the YT-700 class freighter *Swift Exit* asked when Jayk and Brae entered the lounge where he and Dahlis had been talking. Tylo was a former smuggler who had been taken on by Morton Crayne only to be arrested for his role in the operation. Now in a deal that kept him out of prison for his activities he provided transport to the Jedi while they were also able to protect him from any reprisals by Morton or his employers.

“The council has approved the mission.” Jayk replied and then he looked at Dahlis, “They have also reluctantly approved your request to be a part of the mission. You will be the one to make contact with the cult and examine their collection. Record everything and bring back what you find to us. If necessary we’ll use that to get a court order permitting us to take a look at them ourselves.” he said and Dahlis smiled.

“Excellent. I just need to fetch a few things and then I’ll be right back.”

“Hurry professor. The longer that this cult has these artefacts in their possession the more likely it is that something terrible will happen.” Jayk warned him.

2.

“Okay Rayton, our course is set and we should be in the Teramar system in about seven hours.” Morton told the man sat beside him in the gunship’s cockpit wearing combat fatigues. Rayton was a mercenary that had been one of the first new recruits to he had gathered after being broken out of prison and having to rebuild his gang from scratch.

“So what’s the plan?” Rayton asked, “Go in and shoot everyone?”

“Not everything needs blasting Rayton.” Morton replied, “Remember that these fools have things that my client wants and she wants them intact. Now in the old days I had someone who was an expert at getting into places where people kept all sorts of rare and valuable things but she’s not around any more. First we’ll take a look around and survey the target. That should give us some clues on how to get inside when they aren’t expecting us.”

“Then we start blasting?” Rayton said.

“Rayton it is easy to see why the Trade Federation downsized your unit.” Morton commented, “We will use force if needed but the intent is just to grab all the Sith related items that they own and hand it over to the client. Then she can sort out what among it is any use while I celebrate being out of debt to her.”

“So what then? You and her go your separate ways?” Rayton said.

“Are you insane? Hell no. We can make fortune from that lady. Plus I still need to figure out a way to get her into bed and for that I need her to keep wanting to do business with me.” Morton told him.

“Okay so what about these cultists? How do you plan on making contact with them?” Rayton said.

“They’re a cult Rayton. A religion and religions love to recruit new members. That means going out and preaching to the heathens. Don’t you know anything?”

“What, about religion? The only thing I ever prayed for was artillery support.”

“Well I’ve seen plenty of religious beings over the years and the vast majority are the same no matter what they claim to believe. They all worship a system that promises those at the bottom great rewards just as long as they keep giving money to those at the top. Oh and there are often funny hats as well.” Morton said and Rayton frowned.

“Funny hats?” he said.

“Hats or sometimes robes and hoods. Something to mark out the boss from the underlings paying for the fancy churches that he makes video broadcasts from telling the galaxy how some god or gods have told him to raise a few million credits for some obscure reason.” Morton replied.

“So what do we know about the boss of these Children of Korriban?” Rayton said and Morton took out his datapad on which he had copied all of the information Rylee had given him.

“Looks like some guy going by the name of Kilre Tam Venna the Seventh. He has the title of patriarch and as his name suggests is the seventh generation of his family to hold the position.” Morton said and then he smiled, “This is interesting though.”

“What is? Is he not really related to the earlier patriarchs?” Rayton asked.

“According to Rylee’s source there haven’t been any other patriarchs in the cult’s three hundred plus year history.” Morton answered.

“So is he a munn? Or a bith or something?”

“No, according to all the publicity material he’s human. He’s just more than three hundred years old.”

“Poodoo!” Rayton exclaimed, “Human beings don’t live three hundred years.”

“Not naturally no, but one thing that the Sith put a lot of effort into was extending their lives. Something to do with them not being able to exist in the Force after death like Jedi are supposed to be able to do. Death terrifies the Sith.” Morton explained and while he spoke he checked the list of items that the Children of Korriban were believed to own and he smiled, “Ah yes, here we are. There’s a holographic image from about two hundred years ago that shows a man who claimed to be Patriarch Kilre Tam Venna the third wearing a pendant that matches the description of a number of Sith artefacts known to be used for transferring the life essence of one being into another. Oh look, he’s wearing robes as well. No hat though, that’s disappointing.”

“He was allowed to keep something like that?” Rayton said, knowing that the Jedi Order seized and destroyed any Sith artefacts that were potentially harmful.

“My guess is that the pendant in the picture is fake but based on a real one. The Jedi could demand to see it all they liked but the one shown to them was probably just cast up on a desktop printer and then painted while the real one remained hidden. It’s the hidden stuff we’ll be looking for.” Morton said and Rayton nodded.

“Just as long as they aren’t hiding any ancient Sith super weapons. Remember that there are only twelve of us.” he said.

Tylo's eyes widened when Brae entered the *Swift Exit's* cockpit and sat down in the co-pilot's seat beside him.

"Hey kid that's a nice outfit you've got on there. Does your dad know about it?" he said. Like most Jedi Brae wore loose fitting robes that were comfortable and permitted easy movement even when not on an assignment. However, at that moment she had swapped these for a bright red bodysuit, "It does kind of cling to you you know. In fact I'd say that the only time I've seen more of you you were naked."

"Something that we are never supposed to mention. Especially not when my dad could walk in at any moment." Brae replied, "In answer to your question though, yes dad does know what I'm wearing. You have to admit that no-one will suspect me of being a Jedi dressed like this."

"And you do know that the idea of a disguise is that you can avoid being noticed?" Tylo said.

"Yes, so?"

"So take it from me you're going to be noticed wearing that." Tylo told her.

"But no-one will think I'm a Jedi."

"The certainly won't. Just don't tell me where you plan in hiding your lightsaber." Tylo said and Brae winced before Jayk entered the cockpit behind them. Like Brae he was not wearing his usual robes either, however he had chosen a disguise that was more akin to the functional clothing that Tylo wore although he also had a long overcoat over one arm.

"How far out are we?" he asked.

"We're on final approach now. I've got us a landing slot close to the cult's HQ. I figured that was what you'd want." Tylo told him and he nodded.

"Yes, that's good." he said.

"So what about Dahlis? Is he ready?" Tylo said and Brae smiled.

"He was ready when we left. He's back in the lounge talking to Cal. He's given Cal the list of Sith art the cult has bought so that he can see if there's anything he recognises." she said. Cal Udra was an ancestor of Jayk and Brae who had lived at a time when there were far more remnants of the Sith Empire to be found in the galaxy and he had encountered what they had left behind many times during his life. During his life Cal had also created a holocron into which he had placed all of his knowledge and experience, including extensive information about his experiences with the Sith and their technology. As well as his knowledge Cal had created a virtual version of himself to act as a gatekeeper and guide to the holocron's contents and this artificial intelligence now acted as an advisor to Jayk and Brae.

Although Dahlis' area of expertise was art and not history, he still relished the opportunity to speak with Cal whenever he could and the pair frequently discussed the often ornate design work of both Sith and pre-Ruusan reformation Jedi artefacts and the purpose behind them.

"Ready to go meet the cultists professor?" Tylo asked as he, Jayk and Brae entered the lounge once the *Swift Exit* had touched down where they found Dahlis still talking to the hologram of Cal being projected from his holocron on a nearby shelf.

"What? Oh yes, of course." Dahlis replied.

"I think I'll stay put here on the ship." Cal added.

"Good idea. Brae's short of places to carry you." Tylo commented and Cal looked at Brae.

"Well if you think that's bad I should tell you about the time my little sister decided to become a stripper and earned three hundred credits in a night." Cal said.

"When we get back perhaps. Right now I want to find out what the Children Of Korriban are hiding." Jayk ordered.

The Children of Korriban were based on a private estate outside one of Teramar's more provincial cities, close to transport links and a large pool of potential recruits but still far from the centre of planetary government. From here the cult sent out groups of members to deliver sermons in public, setting up stalls intended to encourage beings of all species to convert and join the cult.

The crew of the *Swift Exit* stood at the end of the street and looked along it towards the stall that the group from the Children of Korriban had set up. The street was a wide pedestrian area lined with individual shops on one side and the outer edge of a mall on the other. The size of the street and purpose of the businesses located there giving the cultists a large passing audience for the sermon that one of their number was delivering from in front of their stall while other members of the group moved through the crowd of people offering them printed leaflets or digital information files. Most passers by ignored this however, walking past the cultists without acknowledging their presence.

"We should give it a quick once over before the professor goes in." Tylo suggested and Jayk nodded.

"I agree. We'll wait for you here Tylo." he said.

"Huh?" Tylo commented, "Aren't you two the experts in the Sith here?"

"We're also Jedi. If these people do have Sith artefacts then they might have the means to detect us." Brae pointed out.

"On the other hand you have a better chance of remaining anonymous." Jayk added and Tylo sighed.

"Okay I'm going." he said.

Tylo walked along the street calmly, doing his best to avoid looking like he was actually walking towards the cultists and their stall. However, he made sure to look at how each of the cultists was carrying themselves, searching for any signs that some of them might be carrying hidden weapons. As far as he could tell though the cultists were completely unarmed and most likely harmless but to double check he decided to get a closer look at one of them and he came to a stop close to the man currently delivering the sermon and turned to watch him. The sermon appeared to be based around the Sith as champions of the family while using the Jedi Order's current recruitment practices to paint them as villains who stole younglings from their parents.

"Terrible, isn't it." a voice said from beside Tylo and he looked around to see an attractive young woman standing next to him with a cult badge on her clothing. Tylo had noticed the woman as she approached him but not reacted, wanting her to initiate contact so that she would not suspect he had sought the cultists out but now that she was right in front of him he looked her up and down. He expected that she would be under the impression that he was admiring her body itself when in fact he was looking for the tell-tale signs of a hidden blaster or blade.

Not that the woman's body was not worth admiring, he thought to himself though.

"Oh I don't know, I've heard worse public speakers." Tylo commented when he was satisfied that she was unarmed and despite the poor quality of the joke the woman smiled at him before she went on. Had Tylo made such a comment to a woman in a bar he would have expected her to turn around and leave and so the fact that the woman was still talking to him indicated that she wanted to try and pitch her cult to him and as such would tolerate a certain amount of crass behaviour.

"I was meaning about the fact that younglings can be torn away from their parents just to provide conscripts for the Jedi." she said.

"I thought those kids were dangerous if they were left with their families." Tylo said, remembering all too well an encounter with a Force sensitive teenager whose mother had hidden him from the Jedi and grew up with power that he could not control.

"The Sith showed that Force sensitive individuals could be left with their families and still be trained to control themselves. Perhaps I could interest you in some of the information we're giving out today." the woman said and she held up her datapad. However, Tylo held up his hands.

"Sorry but I'm not in the habit of downloading data to my datapad from people I've just met on the street." he said and the woman smiled again as she took a printed leaflet from beneath the datapad.

"We hear that a lot." she said as she thrust the leaflet towards Tylo.

"Thanks." he said as he took the leaflet, "I can't promise that I'll-" he began as he opened up the leaflet and then he suddenly changed what he was talking about, "These sure are some pretty pictures you have here." he said, pointing to an image of one of the cult's chapels that was decorated with paintings similar to those by Thal N'Krey that Tylo had seen, "Look I'm a space pilot and I'm here on a charter run. My passenger is some art fellow and I think he might like to take a look at those."

"That's certainly possible." the woman said, "The Children of Korriban have one of the most impressive collections of artwork depicting galactic history in the Republic. Being far from the Core we've been able to protect it from the Jedi."

"Not big art fans are they?" Tylo commented.

"No, the Jedi don't want anyone to know the truth about themselves so they suppress all other viewpoints. Tell your friend that his is welcome to attend one of the open services at our headquarters and see the paintings at first hand." the woman replied and Tylo nodded.

"I'll do that." he said before he carried on walking down the street in the same direction he had been going before stopping. This took him further from the rest of the *Swift Exil's* crew but it hid the fact that he had gone down the street purely to make contact with the cultists. Then when he reached the end of the street he walked around the corner and took out his comlink, "You there Jayk?" he transmitted.

"Yes we're all here. We were watching you, how did it go?" Jayk responded.

"Damn I'm good." Tylo said, "Not only have I confirmed that those religious nuts aren't ready to start sacrificing people in the streets I've also done the professor's job for him. I've got us an invite to see their paintings."

"How did you manage that?" Jayk asked.

"Oh it was nothing really, the woman I spoke to seemed quite proud of their art collection. There is one slight catch though." Tylo said.

"You're not taking her out on a date first are you?" Brae commented as she listened in on the conversation, "Because I've got a bad feeling about that."

"No I'm not taking her out on a date. Mind you she was kind of good looking and if the Sith are the polar opposite of you stuck up Jedi then she's probably an easy-" Tylo responded.

"Stick to the point please Tylo." Jayk interrupted.

"Well some of the paintings are on display in the cult's churches so if Dahlis wants to see them then he's going to have to go to one of their services." Tylo said.

"A service? I just came here to look at art." Dahlis pointed out.

"It was the only way I could get you an invite." Tylo said, "Oh and I suggest you take cash with you. From what I know about these religious types they'll respond well to it and a big enough donation should get you to anything not on public display."

"You mean both of you." Jayk said.

"What? Where do I fit in?" Tylo replied.

"You fit in as a bodyguard to Dahlis. I'm not sending him into the clutches of an entire cult of Sith worshippers without some form of protection and neither Brae nor I can risk being found out."

3.

"You see? I told you that they'd let us walk right in." Morton told Rayton as the two men passed through the gates of the Children of Korriban's estate. Immediately inside the main gate was a pathway lined with standing stones that were as tall as a man and were covered in meticulous carvings. The path between these stones led towards a squat pyramid that had similar carvings all around its base and from his time stealing art and artefacts for Rylee, Morton recognised these as being of Sith origin even though he could not understand even the most basic meaning of any of them. The two men were not the only ones walking along the path towards the pyramid though, other beings were heading the same way for the service that had been advertised. Most were already members of the cult and these were obvious from the pendants they wore over their formal clothing. On the other hand the newcomers had no such pendants and their style of dress varied from the formal to the casual style that Morton and Rayton were wearing in the absence of anything better.

Robed cult members stood at intervals among the stones, greeting fellow cult members familiar to them and encouraging new visitors to keep up their pace towards the pyramid. Their bright red robes included hoods but none of the ones visible to Morton and Rayton had these raised and their faces were visible.

"Yeah but I don't fancy sitting through a morning of chants and sermons." Rayton commented, "If I wanted that I could have applied to become a priest when the Trade Federation kicked me out." and Morton had to suppress a laugh at the idea of an individual like Rayton, whose unit in the Trade Defence Force had gained a reputation for the use of excessive force finding any sort of religion, including Sith worship. People prayed for salvation from beings like Rayton, they did not pray for salvation with them.

"Neither do I. What we need to do is duck out and see if we can take a sneaky look around without being watched by these robed freaks." Morton agreed, "Let's see how alert they are shall we?" he added when he thought that they were not being watched and he suddenly side stepped of the path and between two of the standing stones. Rayton followed and the pair of them used the stone for cover as they waited to see if any of the beings in robes along the path would notice that they were no longer walking along it.

"You know I hope these stones aren't on the list of stuff we're supposed to be stealing. They look pretty heavy and we don't have specialist lifting gear with us." Rayton commented.

"Don't worry, there's nothing special about these stones. Look." Morton replied and he placed his finger against the one they were hiding behind. Rayton looked closely at the spot he was pointing at and saw that rather than Sith pictographs, the stone at that spot was carved in aurebesh with the name of a stone masonry company.

"So they're fake. Decoration for the masses." he said.

"Is there a problem brothers?" a voice then said and Morton and Rayton both turned to see one of the robed figures looking at them, "Can I ask you to move along please? The service is due to begin in fifteen minutes."

"My friend and I were actually interested in taking a look around this place. We're interested in-" Morton began before Rayton suddenly lashed out and struck the cultist in his throat. Choking, the man staggered backwards but Rayton reached out and grabbed him before pulling him forwards and then slammed his head into the back of the stone where there was a sudden 'crack' and the cultist collapsed.

"What the hell did you do that for?" Morton hissed.

"Boring conversation anyway." Rayton replied, "Besides, now we can take his robes. I bet no-one here will think twice about someone wearing their own robes walking around with a second person."

"Fine we'll risk it. But we better get a move on before someone else finds this guy." Morton said as he crouched down and began to remove the hooded robe that the cultist was wearing. Then he put this on over his own clothes while Rayton positioned the unconscious and bleeding cultist against the standing stone so that he would not easily be visible from the path on the other side, "Okay let's go." Morton said.

"Where to?" Rayton asked and Morton looked around. There were several other structures visible on the estate, all of them pyramids of some sort although of varying sizes and Morton's attention immediately focused on the largest of them, "For the biggest prize look in the biggest box." he said, pointing to the large building, "Or triangle in this case." and the two men set off across the grass covered ground towards what appeared to be the estate's main structure.

"So what do you make of all this stuff prof?" Tylo asked as he and Dahlis walked along the path lined with standing stones.

"Cheap." Dahlis replied, "The carvings are too regular to be anything other than modern reproductions of what someone thinks ancient tribal carvings should look like. I expect that the symbols are accurate, although we'd probably have to ask the Jedi to confirm that, but these stones were produced by machines."

"Careful what you're saying there." Tylo whispered when he noticed a cultist glare at them.

"What, because I know these stones didn't come from the old Sith Empire?" Dahlis asked.

"No. You mentioned jedi and that sleemo heard you. I wouldn't be surprised if they throw us out for that. Or worse." Tylo said.

"I'll be careful."

"You'll be dead if these guys really do practice Sith beliefs behind closed doors. Me as well." Tylo replied.

"Ah now this is more like it." Dahlis said, smiling when he saw the entrance to the pyramid that the worshippers were being guided towards. Immediately inside the open doorway was a small room with a high ceiling, one wall of which was dominated by a painting of an armoured man holding a red lightsaber above his head while a crowd of worshippers bowed down before him. Moving in for a closer look Dahlis noticed that the signature at the bottom of the painting read Thal N'Krey.

"So who was this guy?" Tylo asked.

"That is Darth Ruin." a nearby cultist told him, "He was once a jedi master until he saw the corruption within the Republic and its supposed guardians and sought to bring order to the chaos they oversaw. He found and united the Sith tribes of the time who had long suffered under the oppression of the Republic and created a new empire that welcomed everyone."

"Thanks." Tylo replied, not really interested in the explanation at all.

"You are most welcome. Now if you would like to proceed inside the service will begin shortly." the cultist told him and he pointed through the next doorway that led into the temple chamber itself where Tylo and Dahlis quickly found a place to sit on one of the benches towards the rear of the room.

Tylo could not help noticing that Dahlis was looking around, studying all of the various paintings and sculptures that were spread around the room.

"Anything here take your interest professor?" he whispered.

"Indeed, there are several excellent pieces here." Dahlis responded.

"And this is just what they're willing to show to people who walk in off the street." Tylo commented, "Just imagine what they must have stashed away for their own enjoyment."

Morton and Rayton approached the primary pyramid cautiously. Despite Morton's disguise they did not want to take the chance that they would fail to perform some specific ritual required to enter it. Ahead of them they saw other cultists both entering and leaving the structure and they observed their behaviour. None of them appeared to be doing anything specific as they passed through the large doorway that sat at the top of a flight of steps but the two men did see that here not all of them were wearing robes.

"Looks like they don't need the robes when the public aren't around to see them." Rayton commented and Morton nodded.

"Good." he replied, "That means we should both blend in nicely. Come on let's get inside."

The two men then walked straight up to the pyramid and climbed the steps towards the entrance. Morton noticed one or two of the cultists glance in their direction and frown when they saw how informally Rayton was dressed but nothing was said and no-one attempted to stop them as they went inside.

Finding themselves in a large reception area they saw that the chamber contained numerous small plinths and on each one was a statue. Added to these there were larger statues either side of each doorway and several paintings hung on the walls.

"So is this stuff what we came for?" Rayton asked softly.

"I hope not. Gathering it all up will be one hell of a job." Morton replied as he took his datapad from under his robe and brought up the list of items Rylee wanted him to obtain, "Stang." he said.

"We want this stuff then?" Rayton said and Morton nodded.

"Some of it, yes. At least half a dozen of the pieces in here, pictures and statues are on the list." he said.

"So we assign a couple of men to grab it while the rest of us find the rest of the stuff." Rayton said.

"Of which there is plenty. The items in here are just the tip of the ice berg. We need to find a turbolift."

"Heading down to find the vault?" Rayton commented.

"No. Up."

"You think that the vault will be on an upper floor?" Rayton asked, confused.

"No, not a vault. Look around you, they keep this stuff on open display for everyone to see. Trust me the head shamans or whatever they call themselves in this cult will be keeping the best stuff for themselves and that means it'll be near their offices." Morton explained and Rayton smiled as he understood.

"Ah, I get it. Those offices will be above us." he said.

"Exactly. Look, I think the turbolifts are over there." Morton said, pointing subtly towards a hallway leading away from the reception area.

This hallway led to a row of three turbolifts that were located on the inside of the pyramid's outer surface and one way glass used in the construction of the pyramid outside the turbolifts allowed the occupants to see that the turbolifts ascended diagonally so that they were always on the outer edge of the level they were on.

Morton and Rayton waited for an otherwise empty turbolift car so that they would not have to risk exposing

their ignorance of the pyramid's layout to a genuine cultist while they looked at the control panel to decide where to start.

"So right to the top?" Rayton suggested.

"I'm not so sure. I wouldn't be surprised if there was some good stuff to be found there but I'd expect Kilre Tam Venna the supposed Seventh to have his personal office there and I don't want to risk running into him right now. Let's try a couple of levels down from there." Morton replied and he reached out to activate the turbolift.

The floor that Morton had chosen was still quite close to the top of the pyramid and so it had limited floor space compared to the much larger entrance level. However, when the doors to the turbolift slid open he and Rayton still stepped out into a fairly long hallway that was lined with Sith art in the form of life sized statues of individual Sith.

"I don't see any of this on the list." Morton commented as they walked between the statues, "However, I do see something that could be useful."

"What?" Rayton asked.

"An empty office with a computer terminal." Morton told him and he stopped to look through an open doorway into an office that had no-one inside and the two men darted inside and closed the door before anyone noticed them.

"Does it work?" Rayton said as Morton sat down.

"Hold on, I've not turned it on yet." Morton replied, activating the machine and he smiled as the emblem of the Children of Korriban appeared on the screen in front of him, "Now let's see if they've been kind enough to leave floor plan where it's easy to find. Ah yes, here we go. Building maintenance." and Morton brought up a diagram of the pyramid that showed the paths taken around it by power and computer network data lines.

"What's that dead space at the top?" Rayton said, noticing that the uppermost part of the pyramid was devoid of these lines.

"Think about it Rayton. The walls slope inwards so each floor is smaller than the one below. That'll be the point where the cult has decided that there isn't enough floor space to bother putting anything up there. Everything we're interested in is below that."

"But what good is this? It doesn't show what's in any of the rooms." Rayton said.

"It doesn't need to. In fact this is better. Things can be left off an inventory but valuables will always be protected and modern security means power and data links for sensors and alarms. Look here, about five levels below us there's a floor that's dominated by this large open space with smaller rooms around the outside. It's littered with data nodes, each one of which could be a sensor protecting some Sith antique. Plus there's power for them all. Added to which we have this room right over here that has data nodes all around its rather thick walls. I know a vault when I see one and that there is a vault." Morton explained and Rayton smiled.

"Can you get us inside?" he asked.

"Ah, unfortunately the answer to that is probably 'no' if it's locked. Then again I don't need to get us inside. You have a man whose good with explosives, don't you?" Morton said and Rayton grinned as he nodded, "Good, I thought so. Now let's go and check that place out. I want to have some idea of what's in there. I'd like to be able to take back more than Rylee was expecting."

4.

Tylo did his best not to look too bored during the service. It was obvious to him that the sermon being delivered was designed specifically for newcomers to the cult, concentrating on the alleged corruption of the Republic and the Jedi Order in particular. Thanks to his time spent in the company of Jayk and Brae, as well as his conversations with Cal's holocron about his life almost four thousand years earlier Tylo knew that almost nothing in the sermon was true. Most of it was in fact the exact opposite of the truth simply stated as fact without anything to support it, while even the claims made that had some basis in truth were twisted to paint the Jedi in the most negative light possible. He was not surprised when towards the end of the sermon the robed man who had delivered it asked for the congregation to donate to the cult by either placing cash into the collection boxes just beginning to be distributed by other cultists or direct transfer from credit sticks that could also be connected to the collection boxes.

"You're not falling for any of this are you professor?" Tylo whispered when he saw Dahlis put a bank note into the box that he then handed to Tylo.

"What? Oh no, to be honest I haven't really been paying any attention. I was studying-" Dahlis replied.

"The art?" Tylo interrupted, smiling.

"Yes, the art." Dahlis said, "When this is over I want to take a closer look at that sculpture behind the pulpit."

"I hadn't noticed." Tylo said as he looked directly at the Sith worshipping priest and saw a carved stone female figure behind him, "Stang!" he hissed, just loudly enough that the man in front of him looked over his shoulder and glared at him, "Not the sermon, I just remembered I missed a dental appointment." Tylo told him. Then when the man looked forwards again Tylo lent closer to Dahlis and whispered to him, "I'd know that face anywhere. That's Vallani Mallet."

"Yes, model and apparent muse for Thal N'Krey." Dahlis replied.

"Also a waitress and prostitute. She was okay as a waitress but you'd have to asked Jayk how good a prostitute she was." Tylo added and the man in front turned to glare at him again, to which Tylo just smiled at him.

When the sermon came to a close Tylo was among the first to jump to his feet ready to leave, but when Dahlis reached the end of their pew he instead turned towards the front of the chapel and headed for the pulpit.

"I need to take a closer look." he said and Tylo sighed as he started to follow the man.

Standing just beside the pulpit the two men could see the sculpture more clearly. The artist who had created it had obviously taken some artistic licence with the appearance of Vallani Mallet in creating this, depicting her as being about twenty centimetres taller than she actually was if the scale was supposed to be life sized but Tylo could see why this had been done. The young woman had been depicted as a warrior and although the robes she was wearing as the statue could potentially have belonged to a Jedi the jagged bladed sword and pointed headdress were obviously not something that a Jedi would carry. Most of the statue was made from the same pale grey stone but a talisman had been included around its neck and at the centre of this was a polished jewel.

"That's her alright." Tylo said as he looked up at the statue.

"Yes, this is definitely by Thal N'Krey." Dahlis said, "I would recognise his style anywhere now and look, around her neck he's even featured Sith hieroglyphs on the necklace that supports the talisman she's wearing."

"Yeah, I've got a bad feeling about that. Do you think it could be a real one that these guys don't know about?" Tylo asked quietly.

"Excuse me but the service has finished." a voice said from behind them and Tylo and Dahlis turned to see a young woman in cult robes looking at them, her hood down so that they could see her face clearly.

"I'm sorry but you I'm a Professor of Art from the University of Coruscant and when I was told about your fantastic collection of Sith related art I just had to come and see it for myself. It's so difficult to view such things first hand on Coruscant what with the Jedi Order looking over your shoulder all the time. I was told that your collection was large, would it be possible to see more than the items you have on display here?" Dahlis said.

"I'm sorry but the main collection is not for public viewing." the cultist said and in response to this Tylo reached under his jacket.

"Okay professor let's try it my way." he said before he pulled his hand out again and thrust it towards the woman so that she could see the bundle of high denomination bank notes he held in it, "We'll pay." he said, smiling at the woman.

"Please wait here." she replied, staring at the money, "I'll go and ask."

"I knew it would work." Tylo then told Dahlis quietly as the woman hurried away.

"I can't believe it." Morton said when he and Rayton entered the main gallery where the cult kept the bulk of its art collection. Every item in the massive chamber was stored inside a protective case fitted with alarm sensors and surrounded by simple benches on which cult members could sit to discuss the contents as several groups around the room were doing at that moment.

"Those cases don't look too sturdy. A blaster will probably get them open if you don't mind the alarms going off." Rayton commented as he looked at the closest of the cases.

"We'll be triggering a bomb to get into the vault. If that doesn't set something off then there's something seriously wrong with these nerf herders. Not that anyone who believes what they do is particularly sane in my view anyway."

"What about that Rylee? Why does she want it if she doesn't believe in any of this?" Rayton asked.

"That's different for two reasons." Morton said, "Firstly she's paying us."

"Okay and what about the other?"

"She's hot. Really hot." Morton replied and both men grinned.

"Yeah I suppose that works." Rayton said, "As long as she doesn't start boiling any pets you've got."

"Stang!" Morton hissed and he suddenly leapt behind a pillar, dragging Rayton with him and looking around it.

"What's wrong?" Rayton said as he peered around the pillar towards the entrance as well.

"That's Tylo Kurrast." Morton said, watching as an older cult member showed both Tylo and Dahlis into the gallery and led them to the nearest display case.

"The guy who used to work for you but now works for the Jedi?" Rayton asked and Morton nodded.

"The very same and that guy with him is some art expert the Jedi have had working for them. Rylee warned me that the Jedi knew that this cult was hiding something but I didn't think that they'd send just those two."

Morton said, "Those Udras must be around somewhere as well. Why is it always them?"

"Maybe they thought that real Jedi would never get in. The cult might be able to pick them out." Rayton suggested and Morton smiled.

"And I wonder how they'd react if they found out who those two work for?" he said.

"Nice idea. Only how do we tell these cultists who they are without them finding out who we are at the same time?" Rayton commented and Morton lifted up the hood of his robes so that most of his face was hidden.

"Because they don't need to know that. Now wait here." he said before stepping out from behind the pillar and walking towards the gallery entrance, heading for the cultist who was in the midst of explaining to Dahlis how the Children of Korriban had gone about amassing their collection of art over several centuries.

Morton walked right up to the cultist and then leant in close to him before he whispered in the man's ear.

"We've done some checking." he said so that neither Tylo nor Dahlis could hear was he was saying, "That man Tylo is an agent of the Jedi." and the cultist frowned.

"Gentlemen." he said to Dahlis and Tylo sternly, "It appears that you have been less than honest with us."

"I don't understand." Dahlis said and the cultist glared at Tylo.

"So you are not an agent of the Jedi Order then?" he said.

"How did you know?" Dahlis responded and Tylo winced.

"Well if they only suspected then they know now professor." he said, "I think we ought to be leaving."

"Yes, I think you should." the cultists said, "Tell the Jedi that they are not welcome here and from now on neither are either of you."

5.

“Your eminence.” one of the trio of cultists who entered the office of Kilre Tam Venna said as all three bowed to their leader. The head of the Children of Korriban had the outward appearance of a human in middle age but in reality thanks to Sith technology he had lived far longer than any ordinary human. The talisman he kept with him at all times enabled him to drain the life from another individual and use it to rejuvenate himself. He had been cautious in its use though, simply maintaining the same youthful appearance permanently would have attracted too much attention so instead he would allow himself to age for a few decades before announcing his retirement and regenerating to a much younger appearance so that he could then step into the role of his own son and take over the running of the cult. This required considerable preparation of course, with numerous falsified documents to show that he had some descendants raised and educated in private while in truth his actual offspring had died long ago, one of them being the first to be sacrificed so that he could be rejuvenated.

“Speak.” Kilre to the man and he looked up.

“Your eminence we have to report a grave violation of security.” the man said.

“How grave?” Kilre asked. The cult had faced threats in the past of course, their premises had been the target for vandalism and a number of journalists had attempted to expose what went on behind closed doors but so far the Children of Korriban had weathered them all.

“It involves the jedi your eminence. A man has been killed.” the cultists said and Kilre's eyes widened.

Despite centuries of denouncing the jedi he had never actually encountered one. He had always been careful to keep the cult's day to day activities within Republic law to head off any investigation by them.

“What happened?” he asked.

“Two men wanted to study our art collection. One had identification that showed him to be a professor from the University of Coruscant while the other man was claimed to be his pilot. They made a sizeable donation to us and they were granted permission to see the main collection. It was then that the second man was recognised by one of the brethren as an agent for the Jedi Order your eminence.”

“Not a jedi though?” Kilre commented, knowing that ancient Sith devices intended to detect individuals with high midi-chlorian counts had been seeded throughout the estate.

“No your eminence. We contacted our source in the Sector Rangers and he has positively identified the man as Tylo Kurrast. A former smuggler pardoned for his crimes by agreeing to work for the jedi.”

“Who knew him?” Kilre said, wondering how any of his members could have known enough about jedi agents to recognise one by sight.

“That is a mystery your eminence. The individual who raised the alarm was not one of our members.”

“Then how was he in the main collection to see this jedi agent?”

“One of the brethren was murdered and his robes taken. We think that the man who warned us about the jedi agent was the killer. He and another man used the robes as a disguise to gain access to the collection as well. They both escaped before they could be detained or identified.”

“Was anything taken?” Kilre said.

“No your eminence, but we can't be certain what the jedi agent has reported back to his masters.” the cultist said and Kilre got to his feet.

“Fellow Sith we have always known that this day was coming. The jedi will be coming for us. Have the collection secured. In the mean time open the armoury and arm the brethren. The jedi should have learned that the Sith do not go down without a fight.”

“So you failed.” Brae said when Tylo and Dahlis returned to the Swift Exit.

“Hey' it's not my fault.” Tylo protested.

“I'm afraid that I may be the one that gave us away.” Dahlis added.

“We're not looking for anyone to blame professor.” Jayk said.

“I'm still sorry that I gave us away after Tylo was recognised.” Dahlis said.

“Wait, Tylo was recognised? So it is his fault.” Brae said, pointing at Tylo and he frowned at her.

“Shouldn't you have changed by now kid? Or are you going to be wearing that bodyglove for good from now on?” he said.

“I was waiting to see if we'd be going out in disguise again.” Brae replied.

“Sure. It's not like you like it or anything.” Tylo said.

“I think it runs in the family,” Cal commented, his hologram materialising, “My sister dressed as a stripper after all. Who knows what future generations of Udra women will wear?”

“If we could stick to the matter at hand?” Jayk said, “Professor Hebro, did you get to examine any of the cult's artwork?”

"Yes, yes I did. I recorded images as well." Dahlis answered and he held out his datapad for Jayk to see, "I think you'll find the first image interesting."

"It's your dad's favourite prostitute." Tylo commented.

"Vallani Mallet." Jayk said when he saw the image of the statue depicting the young model as a Sith warrior.

"You may want to examine the talisman around her neck more closely." Dahlis said.

"Cal?" Jayk said, looking at the hologram.

"Accessing now." Cal responded, "Ah now that is interesting. I saw a talisman just like that when I was overseeing the destruction of a Sith storehouse. Jayk that alone is all we need for a court order to search the cult's compound."

"Good, then I'll take it to the local authorities. We're going to need backup on this. Tylo you'll need your blaster rifle and professor you can sit this out from here on. I promise you that we'll let you see everything we recover."

The armed transport was more spacious inside than the gunship and so Morton had his gang members gather there to prepare while he and Rayton told them what to expect.

"This'll be easy." Rayton said, "There were a few guards but they're focused on stopping people getting in through the gates, not dealing with trouble inside. Plus their weapons were basic."

"There are probably a number of fanatics among them." Morton warned the gang, "Don't count on them all to just panic and run. Some could stand their ground and they need to be put down quickly. If they want to be martyrs then we'll make it easy for them. Now our primary target is the gallery and the vault inside it. Four of you will stay in the reception area to loot it and cover our retreat. Everyone else will come with me to the gallery where we'll blow open all the cases and get the contents loaded into the repulsor crates. Where are they by the way?" and he looked Rayton.

"Don't worry, I managed to get hold of enough. The guy selling them did a deal on a couple of labour droids as well. I figured a couple of extra bodies that don't need to take a cut would go down well." Rayton replied and Morton smiled and nodded.

"Good work. Then as soon as they arrive we'll go." he said.

Jayk returned to the *Swift Exit* in a police speeder that was part of a four strong convoy. The speeder he rode in was an ordinary patrol vehicle all of the others were larger personnel transports, two belonging to the local police and the third to the Sector Rangers.

"You weren't kidding about calling support. Are we searching that estate or occupying it?" Tylo said when he came down the freighter's access ramp and saw the vehicles.

"Probably both." Jayk replied, "The time it will take to search every part of the estate will require it to be secured for several days."

"We'll bring in droids for most of the searching." one of the uniformed beings who had disembarked from the speeder with Jayk added.

"Tylo this is Agent Hennow of the Sector Rangers and the man with her is Lieutenant Oram."

"Police tactical response unit." Oram added.

"Between them and the Sector Rangers we've got almost forty armed officers." Hennow said, "More than enough to deal with a few cultists."

"I hope so because every time anyone says something like that I start to get a very bad feeling." Tylo said.

"Are we going then?" Brae asked she walked down the *Swift Exit's* access ramp and Tylo looked around to see her with the hood of her cloak up and her arms held in front of her so that her hands were inserted into the opposite sleeves of the cloak.

"Yes, get in the speeder and we can be on our way." Jayk replied and he and the two law enforcement officers with him turned to return to the speeder. Brae began to follow him but as she walked past Tylo he reached out to grab her arm.

"Hold on a moment kid." he said softly.

"Let go of me Tylo." Brae responded, also whispering.

"Sure, just shake my hand for luck, okay?"

"No. Now let go of me." Brae told him but although Tylo let go of her arm he instead reached out and slid back the sleeves of her cloak to expose her hands.

"A-ha. I knew it!" he hissed when he saw that they were still covered in the bright red polymer of the body glove.

"Okay so I do like it and I've got it on under my robes. Just don't tell dad okay?"

"Your secret is safe with me kid." Tylo told her, "Or at least until you need to draw your lightsaber."

"Stang. I hadn't thought about that." Brae said.

6.

Morton and Rayton sat in the gunship's cockpit as Morton flew it towards the cult's estate at low altitude to avoid the local air traffic control. As he piloted the craft Rayton monitored the sensors.

"I've got a bad feeling about this." he said suddenly and Morton frowned.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"We're picking up four repulsorlift vehicles at ground level heading for the target at high speed. Much higher than the local limit." Rayton told him.

"Can you get a visual?" Morton said.

"Can you pull up? There's too much cover for a clear line of sight down here." Rayton pointed out.

"If I pull up we'll show up on radar." Morton reminded him.

"No matter I've got them. Stang." Rayton said when the vehicles he was monitoring moved into the open briefly and Rayton saw the red lashing lights on their roofs, "Cops. Sector Rangers as well. Lots of them."

"The Jedi must have been able to get a court order still. Stang, I was hoping we'd have delayed them."

Morton hissed, "Okay they'll be going in through the main entrance so I'll take us around the other side and we'll drop there. If we're quick enough we can be on the ground and then our ships can circle until we need them. Tell the transport that their pilot is stay aboard and our gunners can stay here to take over from us. If the Jedi do get in our way then at least we can call in air support. It'll take them time to call in their own."

Although they were travelling with warning lights flashing, the four police and Sector Ranger vehicles did not have their sirens active and so the first thing that the cultists knew of their approach was when the lead vehicle appeared heading for the estate's main gate. This was a heavy structure made from jagged metal bars that normally stood open to welcome visitors. However, the Children of Korriban had been expecting this raid and they had closed the gates in preparation.

"Stop here." Jayk told the driver of his speeder, "I'll deliver the court order."

"Wait, perhaps I should do it." Hennow suggested.

"You've got to admit that they might not have quite such a problem with Sector Rangers as Jedi." Tylo pointed out and Jayk nodded.

"Very well. But be careful." he said, handing the datapad that had a copy of the court order permitting the search of the estate on it to her.

The speeder was still several metres away from the gates when Hennow got out and as she strode toward them she saw two standing guard cultists on the other side, both with blasters on their hips.

"My name is Agent Hennow." she told the guards and she held up the datapad, "I have a court order permitting me to search this compound under the terms of the Control Sciences Act article trill herf xesh, paragraph one-one-three-eight. Open up."

"This is our place of worship." one of the guards replied, "We have the constitutional right to our privacy." Hennow smiled.

"Court. Order." she said, shaking the datapad, "Either you open the gate or we take it off it's hinges."

"We will not be intimidated by Jedi lapdogs." the guard replied snarling.

"Okay, we tried to be nice about this." Hennow said as she reached for her own sidearm. However, before she could draw the weapon a spinning disk of metal came flying between the bars of the gate. This struck Hennow in the throat just above the collar of her armoured vest and her eyes widened in surprise as the disk cut through her neck. However, before she could cry out her head toppled from her shoulders and her decapitated corpse collapsed.

"It's a trap!" Tylo exclaimed when he saw this and he opened the door of the speeder before rolling out and firing his rifle towards the gate.

"What was that?" Oram asked as the other occupants of the speeder followed Tylo's example and disembarked.

"Lanvarok. An ancient Sith ranged weapon." Jayk told him, "Totally illegal."

"Looks like the cult is putting up a fight." Rayton said when the gunship's sensors picked up weapon discharges.

"I told you, they're fanatics." Morton replied, "Hopefully it'll keep the heat off us."

"Hey there's something else here."

"What?"

"You know that dead space at the top of the pyramid?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well it's not so dead any more. There's an energy signature coming from inside." Rayton said and Morton's

eyes widened.”

“What sort of energy signature?” he asked, concerned that it could be some sort of anti-aircraft weapon.

“I think it's a ship.” Rayton told him and a smile spread across Morton's face.

“Okay change of plan. I think that our personal saviour Kilre Tam Venna has just provided us with an unmissable opportunity. Only you and I will be going in. Everyone else falls back. I've got an idea.” he said.

As soon as the police and Sector Ranger tactical teams deployed the two cultist guards had no choice but to fall back. The firepower the teams had at their disposal was more than enough to turn the area just inside the gate into one large kill zone. The cultists armed with lanvaroks continued to attack from their hiding places further back from the gate but these proved ineffective when members of the tactical teams brought forwards portable armoured blast shields that they held up in front of themselves.

“The gate.” Jayk told the shield bearers, “Get Brae and I to the gate.”

Two of the shield bearers promptly positioned themselves in front of the lightsaber wielding jedi and together they advanced, lanvarok disks splintering as they struck the shields.

Once at the gates Jayk and Brae acted together, attacking the hinges on each side, moving from bottom to top.

“Ready?” Brae called out when only the top hinges remained.

“Ready.” Jayk replied and they cut through the final hinge on each side at the same time. Before the gates could come crashing down on top of them though the two jedi each used the Force to release a blast of telekinetic energy and the gates instead flew away from them, each half landing separately.

“Forwards!” Jayk yelled and the tactical teams advanced, still using the blast shields for cover and laying down covering fire towards anywhere that looked like it was the hiding place for a cultist.

While the attention of the cultists was focused entirely on the jedi and law enforcement officers attacking the estate's main gate Morton was able to set down the gunship on the far side without being noticed. Then he and Rayton disembarked and as the gunship took off again they headed for the main pyramid. The cultists had deployed guards to the main entrance of this structure but thanks to the time he had spent studying the power and data distribution system Morton knew where these entered the pyramid and he and Rayton made their way towards this instead.

As he had expected, the terminal point at the base of the pyramid was located beside another doorway and Rayton fixed a small baradium strip to the lock.

“Stand back.” he said before there was a sudden flash as the baradium burned through the lock and the door suddenly slid upwards.

The cultists had not left this door totally unguarded, but fighting the jedi and their law enforcement allies had left them with few fighters to spare and so there was only a single guard that Morton shot dead before he could raise the alarm.

“Okay now let's move quickly. We're going up. First stop the gallery, I want to test my theory.” he said and Rayton nodded as he followed Morton into the pyramid.

“Your eminence there are too many of them. What are we to do?” one of the senior cultists said as he burst into Kilre's office to find the cult leader standing by the window made of one way glass looking out across the estate to where the flashes of blaster fire could be seen getting closer.

“We are Sith. We do not surrender.” Kilre said, “Order the brethren to fight on. Anyone who retreats is to be killed. I need time to prepare.”

“Prepare what your eminence?” the cultist asked.

“My final solution. If the Children of Korriban are to die then we shall not die alone.” Kilre replied and the cultist nodded before rushing from the room.

Kilre then turned to his computer and entered a few simple commands along with his personal security code.

“Fusion reactor overload initiated. Detonation in six minutes. Silent countdown. There will be no further warnings.” the computer said.

Smiling Kilre then made his way to the side of his office where a painting had been removed from the wall.

This had left a blank space that looked the same as any other wall panel but when Kilre pressed in a particular place it slid open to reveal a turbolift that he entered.

This took him up the pyramid to the void at the very top where the transport that had been hidden there since the structure was constructed more than a century earlier was stored. Like the building in which it was kept, the transport was pyramidal in shape, with a large lower deck for storage and a smaller flight deck above this. The hum coming from the craft indicated that its engines were already online and it was ready for launch. The only thing preventing it from taking off was the security code that only Kilre knew. The last thing he wanted was his personal escape ship escaping without him.

Walking up the access ramp Kilre entered the cargo hold to find it filled to capacity with as much of the Sith

art and artefacts the cult owned as possible, including the vast majority of the forbidden items. Sealing the ramp behind him Kilre went to the ladder in the middle of the hold and climbed it to the flight deck. Sitting down in the pilot's seat he promptly entered his security code and as the top of the pyramid outside began to unfold to permit the ship to take off he started to strap himself in.

However, before he could finish he heard a voice from behind him.

"Thanks for that your eminence." Morton said, "My associate Mister Rayton and I just couldn't figure out the code."

Kilre turned his chair towards the newcomers and gasped when he saw their blasters pointing at him.

"I'll pay you-" he began before Morton shot him and he slumped forwards.

"Now we leave?" Rayton asked and Morton smiled.

"Now we leave." he replied, "We've got everything Rylee asked for and more besides. My debt to her is clear and I can name my price for the rest. Of course it'll come cheaper if the negotiations are pillow talk."

"Look!" Brae called out when the pyramid began to open when they were just over a hundred metres from it and Jayk looked up to see the transport take off.

"What the hell is that?" Tylo asked as he continued to fire his rifle at the cultists hurling sharpened metal disks at him from their ancient weapons.

"We're too late." Jayk said, "I can sense the Dark Side from that ship. It must be loaded with everything we came for."

"We can still stop it." Oram called out, "Forwards! We'll shoot it down."

Danger.

Brae sensed the disturbance in the Force as the tactical teams pushed further forwards, several of their members firing their weapons up at the transport as it slowly gained altitude.

"No! Get down!" she yelled and she threw herself to the ground moments before the entire pyramid exploded.

Jayk watched as the surviving members of the cult present at the estate were being loaded onto transports by the police.

"If it makes you feel any better even they didn't know about that escape ship." Tylo said, walking up to the jedi and standing behind him.

"Not really, no." Jayk replied, "Although we'll never know who was inside that pyramid when it exploded it is likely that the cult leader escaped with a sizeable collection of forbidden material and Brae and I must answer to the council for that. Hopefully she will consider her fashion choice before we meet with them again though."

Tylo smiled, looking at where Brae was talking with a pair of sector rangers, the bright red of the bodyglove covering her hands standing out against the pale brown of her robes.

"Ah yes. So are you mad at her for that? You haven't mentioned it to her."

"I knew before we left the ship." Jayk said and Tylo stared at him.

"Huh?" he said and Jayk produced a small bottle from a pouch on his belt, "Is that solvent?" Tylo asked.

"Yes, meant for dissolving instant contact adhesive. I took this from your tool kit." Jayk said.

"I still don't get it." Tylo said.

"Without this Brae will not be able to remove the bodyglove." Jayk said, "I applied a drop of adhesive to the zipper at the base of her neck when she was distracted. It won't attack the material of the bodyglove though so Brae may keep it if she wishes. "

"A practical joke? From you? I'm impressed."

"It was Cal's idea actually."

"That makes more sense." Tylo said, "May I have that solvent back though? It is mine after all."

"Of course. Although Brae will-" Jayk began as he handed the bottle to Tylo but as soon as the former smuggler had it in his hand he spun around and hurled it into a nearby pond where it landed in the water and disappeared.

"Now that's a better joke." he said