

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

1-11: PROPHECY &

CONSEQUENCE

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1-1 1: PROPHECY & CONSEQUENCE

When an ancient prophecy comes to the attention of a fanatical jedi, the Udras are accused of having fallen to the Dark side. But those who seek out darkness in others sometimes do not see it within themselves..

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1.

"Your feelings on this are clear Master Karas?" the Jedi master who had just listened to the message from the master who commanded the enclave on Moldas asked. Unfortunately the time lag for communication between Coruscant and Moldas was significant, even when the beacon network was functioning at optimum capability. This meant that there was a gap between him sending his question and receiving an answer back from Master Karas.

"I am certain. The message is clear and I have received it on multiple occasions while meditating."

"The council has investigated this and they are not convinced."

"Then they are wrong. The Udra family will serve the Sith."

Approximately three thousand seven hundred and thirty years later.

The hologram had been recorded by a warship belonging to the Trade Federation. The vessel was a missile frigate that had answered a call to provide support for a Jedi knight in the Uratas system in the Outer Rim. The footage showed volley after volley of missiles striking a moon that orbited a gas giant. But rather than exploding on impact the missiles appeared to perform a controlled landing. Then after a final volley had been fired and made a safe landing every one of them was detonated simultaneously. This was enough to knock the moon out of orbit and send it falling into the gas giant itself, resulting in the complete destruction of the moon and everything on it.

The woman watching the hologram shut it off at the point where the moon broke apart rather than sit through the rest of the footage that she had already watched several times in her quest to understand exactly how the Jedi Order had been involved in the destruction of an entire moon. Looking into the history of the moon the woman saw that it once been a mining colony until it was abandoned as the resources of the moon became uneconomical to continue collecting from there and after that it was not mentioned in the records of the Republic or the Jedi archive up until its destruction. A single shuttle had escaped the destruction and although the Republic had been able to classify everything about what happened the handful of survivors that were aboard the shuttle had confirmed that the moon had acted as a shadow port and had a population in the tens of thousands, all of them now dead. Whatever had happened there recently though had concerned the council enough that they had limited access to the detailed mission records. However, the name of the Jedi Knight involved was widely known among members of the Order, Jayk Udra and using this the woman was doing all she could to try and determine the truth of the matter.

The name 'Udra' was familiar to her, the family had served as Jedi for thousands of years and there were currently a handful of members active within it. Unusually two of these, Jayk and a female Padawan named Brae had been assigned to work together in apparent contradiction of the Jedi Code's requirement to avoid attachment. Curious, the woman searched for any other examples of close members of the Udra family working together. This had revealed multiple occasions on which more than one member of the family had worked together before the Ruusan Reformation that had made the Jedi Code more than just guidelines to be taken into consideration. But among these one stood out more than any other.

Several thousand years earlier Cal Udra and his younger sister Lara had been assigned to what had then been known as the Narthis Sector and uncovered a major plot to exploit Sith knowledge. Their original superior had been a Jedi master named Ben Karas. Master Karas had not lived to see the plotters publicly exposed and defeated but there were communications between him and the council shortly after the Udras had been deployed to the region under his command and they made for interesting reading.

Like all Jedi, Master Karas would sometimes have premonitions of events that had not yet happened. These could occur at almost any time but during periods of meditation and sleep when the mind was most relaxed were most common. These were never guaranteed to be accurate, the very nature of free will meant that any number of events could transpire to change the circumstances required for a vision of the future to remain valid but Master Karas had had sufficient belief in his premonitions that he felt them worth bringing to the attention of the Jedi Council.

The Udra family will serve the Sith.

The visions granted to Master Karas had never named any specific member of the Udra family that this was supposed to refer to but at the time he had felt it meant Cal and Lara. However, neither they nor any member of the Udra family since then had fallen to the Dark Side of the Force. Not even during the tumultuous times of the Jedi Civil War.

Looking at Jayk's record there was no reason to believe that he had fallen to the Dark Side either. Or at least not in the records that had been made available. But there were gaps in his recent history, the mission to the Uratas system apparently not being the only one that the Jedi Council wanted kept quiet. One common theme

in the reports that were available however, was that they were travelling in the company of a career criminal named Tylo Kurrast who had somehow managed to get a pardon issued by the Republic's judicial department at the request of someone within the Jedi Order.

The padawan Brae Udra was another interesting point. Ordinarily it would not have been unusual for a seventeen year old padawan to be accompanying a Jedi knight in the field to learn from them at first hand. But a review of Brae's records indicated a student not ready for field deployment. Her scores lagged far behind what would normally be expected of someone her age while the reports of her instructors in the temple indicated that she was prone to tapping into the Dark Side of the Force without realising it and the woman could see no reason why Jayk Udra would have agreed to accept Brae as his padawan.

Now the woman found herself looking at footage of a moon being destroyed on the orders of a Jedi knight whose assignment violated the spirit of the Jedi code and was undertaking missions that were not being recorded in the Jedi archives as they ought to be. There were some mentions of an artist who had vanished but the woman failed to see how that could lead to the destruction of an entire moon.

Unless the prophecy had now come true and Jayk and Brae Udra had fallen under the sway of the Dark Side of the Force and even now were working to revive the ancient Sith Empire.

Transferring all of the relevant files to her datapad the woman shut off the terminal she had been working at and got up to leave the archives. If the answers she sought could not be found here then she would just have to go and find them elsewhere.

"Jedi Neela Vortress is outside." the padawan announced to the gathered members of the Jedi council, "She wishes to address the council."

"Jedi Vortress should know by now that the council does not wait on her." Grand Master Karadon Ress replied.

"Perhaps hear her we should." Master Yoda added from the other side of the circle of masters, "If so determined she is to see us, then important this may be."

"In her mind at least." Master Ress said.

"If we refuse to see her now you know she'll just be waiting out there when we leave." another of the masters commented, "At least if we admit her now we can be sat down while she explains the latest example of corruption in the Republic's higher echelons she's uncovered." and there was limited laughter from around the room while Grand Master Ress noticed Yoda frowning. Ress knew that the diminutive Jedi master could take a joke and had a somewhat dry sense of humour but during council meetings he was never anything but serious.

"Send her in." Ress said and the padawan bowed before exiting. Then moments later the doors to the council chamber slid open again and the woman who had been reviewing the available records about Jayk and Brae Udra entered. She stood out significantly from the masters circled around her and the padawan had shown her in her style of dress. While the other Jedi wore traditional tan or grey robes she wore something more akin to a formal dress in a striking black and red and whereas the other Jedi wore their lightsabers openly like a badge of office hers was nowhere to be seen.

"Masters, you honour me with this audience." Neela said, bowing her head as she faced the grand master's seat.

"An honour that assumed yourself, you did." Yoda pointed out, "Serve you, the council does not."

"Perhaps Jedi Vortress could just tell us why she is here?" Grand Master Ress suggested and he looked at Neela.

"Thank you grand master." she replied, straightening up, "Masters, I come here today on a matter of grave importance. More than seven centuries ago the Sith were finally defeated, their beliefs like the species that gave them birth made extinct."

"A history lesson you have for us?" Yoda said, "To the point, get."

"Masters I believe that we may be faced with a revival of the Sith Empire." Neela said and the masters exchanged nervous glances. Neela expected her announcement to have a greater impact than this and she was immediately suspicious about what the council may already know, "A member of our own order has displayed behaviour suggesting that he is operating outside the Jedi code and has fallen to the Dark Side."

"Who is this individual?" Ress asked.

"I speak of Jedi Knight Jayk Udra." Neela said.

"A serious accusation this is." Yoda responded, "Proof, we will need."

"And I have it right here." Neela said as she held up her datapad. Then she used it to connect to the council chamber's holographic display system before replaying the footage of the destruction of the moon in the Uratas system, "Jayk Udra was responsible for the deaths of thousands of beings and according to other records there are periods of time during the past few months where his movements and actions cannot be accounted for. In addition he has not only begun travelling aboard a private starship that is owned by a known criminal and has taken as his padawan learner a close relative. Not only is she his niece but her records clearly indicate that she is unsuited to her current position. It is my belief that Jayk Udra has

removed her from the temple and ceased using Republic transportation so that he may instruct his padawan in the ways of the Dark Side as was prophesied."

"Prophecy you speak of? What prophecy?" Yoda asked.

"A Jedi master named Ben Karas prophesied that the Udra family would one day serve the Sith. But the Sith are extinct and there are no longer any family units within the Jedi Order. Except for Jayk and Brae Udra."

"I'm not familiar with a Master Karas." one of the council said.

"He lived more than three and a half thousand years ago." Neela told him, "He was killed shortly before the Mandalorian War and the Civil War that followed it."

"I was aware of this prophecy," Grand Master Ress added, "and I also know that it created friction between Master Karas and a Jedi master named Varn Udra. It is recorded that the pair almost came to blows on their first meeting."

"If you are aware of the prophecy then why did you permit Jayk Udra to take Brae as his padawan?" Neela asked.

"I didn't permit it. I and the council ordered it." Ress answered, "That prophecy is false. The Sith are extinct, their fire gone out of the galaxy. All that remains is for us to clean up the mess they have left behind and that is exactly what Jayk and Brae Udra are doing. Their mission reports are restricted because of their nature. You of all people Jedi Vortress should be aware that we do not publicise any information that could provoke an unhealthy interest in the Sith by anyone. Including members of our own order."

"Then you do not intend to-"

"I intend to let Jedi Udra continue with his work until it is either complete or I have proof that he is unsuited to the task, Jedi Vortress. Now I think that you have taken up enough of the council's valuable time with your wild accusations. You are dismissed."

"But grand master-"

"Done this audience is." Yoda interrupted, "Heard what the council has to say you have. Duties I am sure you have. Return to them."

"Yes Master Yoda." Neela replied and she bowed her head towards the grand master again before leaving the council chamber.

Then as the door slid shut behind her Grand Master Ress looked at Yoda.

"You opposed assigning Brae to Jayk." he pointed out.

"Opposed it I did." Yoda agreed, "But division on the council, good it is not. Now done with this, Jedi Vortress may be."

"I hope so." Ress replied, "But I've got a very bad feeling that we haven't heard the last of this."

Meanwhile outside the Jedi council chamber Neela found her padawan waiting for her.

"Master." the young woman said when Neela appeared, "I did not expect you so soon."

"The council would not listen Mey." Neela replied, "They require 'proof'. Apparently Jayk Udra's behaviour to date is insufficient. I did discover some interesting information, however. The council has classified many of Jedi Udra's missions because of their connection to the Sith. Also they were the ones that took the decision to pair Jayk Udra with his niece."

"So what will you do now master?" Mey asked and Neela paused to consider her next course of action. The council had not given her any specific orders and Grand Master Ress had indicated that he wanted proof of any wrongdoing before he would take any action.

"The council wants proof, not leads." she said eventually, "So if proof is what they want then proof is what I shall get."

2.

The Jedi temple was equipped with an extensive hangar that held numerous small starships. Most were transports or scout ships but there were also a number of starfighters. Among the transports was a nondescript Corellian YT-700 class transport ship, the *Swift Exit*. Tylo Kurrast, the vessel's owner was perched on top of the vessel examining one of the two rectenna dishes when he heard a woman's voice calling out from below.

"Hello?"

Tylo crawled over to the side of the hull and looked down at the floor of the hangar to see a pair of women standing there. One had the look of a Jedi a few years older than Brae but still sporting the braid that marked out Padawans from knights. On the other hand the older woman looked much different, wearing a dress that would not look out of place among much of the Republic's high society.

"My my, what do we have here?" Tylo responded, focusing on Neela, "Hang on, I'll be right down." and he hurriedly crawled back to the *Swift Exit*'s upper hatch and climbed down before making his way to the access ramp to greet the new arrivals, "I'm Tylo Kurrast," he said to Neela, "and who might you be?"

"I am Jedi Vortress." Neela replied, "I know Brae Udra is aboard and I wish to speak with her."

"Jedi huh?" Tylo said, frowning briefly. Neela's appearance had led him to believe that she was a VIP that would be travelling aboard his ship and he had been considering how he might use that to get close to her. Then it suddenly occurred to him that she may have sensed his intentions and decided that it would be in his best interests to get away from her as quickly as possible, "I'll just go and get her." he said quickly before hurrying back inside the ship leaving the two Jedi standing waiting outside.

"Tylo what's going on?" Brae asked as he rushed into the cockpit where she was sat monitoring the sensor diagnostics while he was supposed to be working on the rectenna, "You came down that ladder like-"

"There's a woman outside wants to speak to you." Tylo interrupted.

"A woman? Who?"

"I've never seen her before. She says her name is Vortress though and she's a Jedi. Not that she dresses like the rest of you monks."

Brae frowned.

"You were thinking about trying to sleep with her weren't you?" she said.

"Kind of." Tylo muttered, avoiding eye contact with her.

"I'll go see what she wants then." she said before getting up and leaving the cockpit. Walking down the access ramp she saw the two women still stood waiting for her, "Jedi Vortress?" she said.

"Padawan Udra." Neela replied, "Come with me."

"My uncle told me to help Tylo with the repairs to the *Swift Exit*." Brae replied.

"It is improper to refer to your master in terms of a family relationship." Neela said sternly, "Now I am ordering you to accompany me Padawan. I need information only you can provide me with."

"Of course." Brae said, concerned that she may have just landed herself in trouble and as Neela and Mey turned to walk away from the *Swift Exit*, Brae followed them.

Inside the cockpit of the *Swift Exit* Tylo watched them leave.

"Call me the paranoid type if you want," he said to himself, "but something about this just doesn't look good to me."

Brae followed Neela through the hallways of the Jedi temple towards a section filled with private offices and conference chambers that could be used by any member of the Jedi Order that needed to conduct business in private. Along the way Brae noticed that although Neela was happy to lead the way, not even bothering to check that Brae was still behind her, her Padawan Mey was acting as if she was deliberately keeping Brae in front of her and Brae got the impression that she was being treated like a prisoner under escort. Neither Neela or Mey had attempted to take Brae's lightsaber from her but such an act would be highly unusual and Brae would be entitled to know why such action was being taken.

"In here." Neela said, stopping beside the door to a private office and opening it. Then she stood back to allow Brae to enter the room first.

Inside the office had the same spartan style of decoration as the rest of the temple, containing just a small table with chairs around it and a single computer terminal in the centre. Without waiting to be instructed to do so Brae sat down and watched as Neela in turn sat directly opposite her. On the other hand Mey remained standing, positioning herself just inside the only door in or out as if to prevent Brae from leaving.

"What's going on?" Brae asked.

"Padawan Udra would it surprise you to know that almost everything about your assignment runs counter to the Jedi code?"

Brae was confused. She was well aware that her being assigned to train under a close family member was highly unusual. But according to everything that she had been told it had been done at the insistence of the Jedi Council rather than her uncle having requested to work with her.

"I thought-" Brae began.

"Yes or no will suffice." Neela interrupted and Brae was taken aback by this. As far as she could tell this was becoming an interrogation.

"Then yes." she said and Neela smiled.

"Good." she said, "Then perhaps you'll be willing to provide me with a little more background information."

"Jayk!" a voice called out as Jayk Udra stepped from the turbolift and Jayk turned to see one of the other Jedi in the same hallway as him looking straight at him and he smiled as he recognised him as a friend since their days as padawans.

"Thomus." he said, "I thought you were in the Mid Rim."

"I got back about an hour ago." Thomus replied, "So, blown up any more moons?"

Jayk sighed.

"Am I ever going to live that down?" he asked.

"Oh I doubt it." Thomus said, "Let's face it, it's not something many of us get to do. I mean what were you thinking? Is it some plan to get yourself noticed by the Council in hopes of being made a Master? Because if it was you may want to reconsider your strategy. Start with a gift basket."

"Nice to see being exiled to the Mid Rim hasn't dulled your sense of humour. If you spent as much time practising with your lightsaber as you do with your wit you'd rival Master Yoda as a swordsman."

"First point, I wasn't 'exiled' as you put it. The Council merely felt I could benefit from a deployment further away from any Senators than being in the temple allowed for." Thomus said, "Secondly if I hadn't come back then I couldn't be the one to give you the good news."

"Good news? Thomus the last good news you gave me was that you weren't facing charges for taking that-"

"I found your guy." Thomus said before Jayk could finish.

"What guy?" Jayk asked.

"That artist you've been looking for. That N'Krey isn't it?"

"Yes. Yes, that's right. But how?"

"Easy really. The cops pulled his body from the ocean. It was in pretty bad shape but he still had his wallet and ID on him."

"I've got a watch on all law enforcement databases for any mention of him. Why didn't it show up?"

"Because I told them not to make any formal reports until you were told. Who knows who else may be keeping an eye on those things."

"You told them? But how did you know?"

"The cops came to me for advice. As well as his ID, That's wallet contained this." Thomus said and he held up a small transparent plastic bag so that the piece of paper inside was visible.

"What's that?" Jayk asked and Thomus smiled.

"That is exactly what the police asked themselves." he said, "Fortunately they were smart enough to pass it to an analysis droid that identified the writing on it as Sith. So they contacted the closest Jedi knight available and it landed with me. I already checked though and the paper's worthless. It's fairly new, the writing is gibberish and the ink used is a modern commercial type. But I knew you were looking for the guy so I thought I'd come back here and deliver the news in person."

"You're right Thomus. This is good news." Jayk said as he took the bag and the piece of paper it contained, "What planet?"

"Happ." Thomus told him, "The police there are expecting you."

"Thanks." Jayk said, "I'll go check it out."

Returning to the *Swift Exit*, Jayk found Tylo in the ship's lounge sat watching a film taken from the Jedi temple's library.

"The repairs to the sensors are complete then?" Jayk asked.

"Ah, well there was a slight hitch with that." Tylo replied, pausing the film and Jayk frowned.

"Where's Brae?" he said, noticing that he could not sense the strong and familiar presence that his niece had in the Force.

"That's the hitch." Tylo said, "Another of your lot turned up and took her away."

"Define 'took her away'."

"Well she turned up here with her queen of the night look and I figured she was going to be a passenger so I introduced myself to her nicely. Then she demanded to see Brae so I decided it was best to come in here and get her. Then I watched from the cockpit as she left with the woman and her padawan."

Jayk stared at him.

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

"That's what I thought." Tylo said, "But there didn't seem to be much I could do about it. It's not like I can give orders around here."

"No. But another Jedi knight should not be ordering my padawan to desert her post." Jayk said, "Wait, you said you spoke to this Jedi. Did she give you her name?"

"Sure. Vortress. Do you know her?"

"I know the name and I think I've seen her on occasion but I wouldn't exactly say I knew her." Jayk said, "But that is about to change I think." then he put the piece of paper Thomus had given him down on the table before looking back at Tylo, "While I'm gone I want you to plot a jump to Happ in the Mid Rim. We have a lead on Thal N'Krey that needs following up."

Jayk then left the *Swift Exit* and strode across the hangar to a data terminal set into one of the massive chamber's supporting columns.

"I need the location of Jedi Vortress." he said.

"Jedi Vortress has logged into a terminal in tower four, level one hundred and sixty. Do you wish to be connected?" the terminal responded, showing a floor plan that highlighted Neela's location.

"No." Jayk said, "I require nothing further." and the screen turned itself off.

Jayk then headed for the section of the temple that the computer had informed him Neela could be found in and as he walked through the temple his stern expression and rate of movement ensured that other beings got out of his way without speaking to him. Almost as soon as he exited the turbolift onto the one hundred and sixtieth floor he was able to sense Brae from her presence in the Force. However, worryingly this was disrupted in such a way that suggested to Jayk she was severely agitated.

Walking up to the door of the office where the computer had told him he could find Neela, Jayk could tell that his niece was also on the other side of the door and he pressed the intercom set into the wall beside the door itself.

"Go away." a stern female voice said and the intercom was deactivated before Jayk could speak. Refusing to be deterred Jayk pressed the intercom again. This time there was no response at all, however and the intercom was deactivated straight away. Snarling, Jayk stepped back from the door and drew his lightsaber. There was a 'snap-hiss' as he activated the weapon and then he swung it at the door frame, aiming for the point where the sealing mechanism was located. There was a sudden shower of sparks as the blade sliced effortlessly through the door frame and the door slid upwards to reveal a shocked looking padawan standing just inside the office while Brae and Neela sat at the table in the centre.

"I tried the intercom." Jayk said while Mey backed away from the door, unwilling to draw her lightsaber against him, "But it seemed to be broken so I decided to let myself in."

"Jedi Udra," Neela said as she got to her feet and she calmly drew her own lightsaber from beneath a split down the side of her dress that ran up to her thigh, "how good of you to join us." and there was another 'snap-hiss' as she activated the weapon.

Instinctively Brae reached for her lightsaber as well but Jayk intervened before she could draw it.

"No Brae." he said, "Just come with me. Whatever is going on here, it is ended."

"It ends when I say so." Neela responded.

"I don't think so." Jayk said, "Brae is my padawan Jedi Vortress and you know as well as I do that common courtesy demands that you come to me if you wish to speak with her. You also know that you have no right to detain her without giving her the opportunity to have someone speak on her behalf."

All of a sudden there was the sound of armoured feet running towards the office from both directions and two pairs of masked temple guardians appeared. All four brandished their traditional double-bladed lightsabers but for now at least they were in an inactive state.

"Stand down!" one yelled from behind his mask and all four ground to a halt.

"That's quite alright." Jayk said as he shut off his lightsaber and returned it to his belt, "My padawan and I were just leaving. Isn't that right?" and he stared at Neela.

"Of course." she said and she too shut off her lightsaber and concealed it under her dress once again.

"Brae come with me." Jayk said and Brae nodded before darting out of the office to stand beside him and between the two pairs of guardians."

"What is happening here?" one of them demanded, looking at Jayk.

"Oh the intercom was broken and I think I startled Jedi Vortress when I tried to knock." he replied.

"This will be reported." the guardian told him, "The council will decide what action is to be taken."

"Yes," Jayk said, staring at Neela as he spoke, "I am sure they will."

3.

"Go back to the *Swift Exit* and wait for me there." Jayk told Brae when the turbolift door slid shut, "Under no circumstances are you to leave the ship, do you understand?"

"Yes master. But what's going on?" Brae responded, "She kept asking me about our missions together and asking for proof that we'd handed everything to do with the Sith over to the archives."

"I don't know. But perhaps if I could find out more about Jedi Vortress herself the reasons could become clear." Jayk told her just as the turbolift came to a halt and the door slid open again. Jayk disembarked here, allowing Brae to continue on her way back to the hangar.

Jayk had exited the turbolift in one of the temple's training areas and there was the muffled sound of blaster fire coming from ahead of him as he followed the passageway. Though a lightsaber was the primary weapon of a Jedi, all members of the Order were expected to be proficient with a much wider variety of weapons both close combat and ranged. The Jedi Order recognised not only that lightsabers were not suitable for every situation but also that the weapon was so distinctive that any chance of remaining anonymous was destroyed the instant a Jedi was found to be carrying one. The number that existed illegally in private hands was too small to be used as a reasonable excuse for possessing one.

The firing range that Jayk stepped into was filled with a row of Padawans all aiming blaster pistols down range at holographic targets that for the purpose of this training session were static rather than dodging and weaving as they would be by the time the Padawans were ready for deployment in the field. Jayk made his way to the range officer's station where a female Jedi sat monitoring the Padawans' performances.

"Kat." he said and she looked up and smiled.

"Jayk. How are things going out there in the real world?" she asked.

"Oh you know, same poodoo, different day. I ran into Thomus earlier though. I'm sure he'd have sent his regards if he'd known I'd end up seeing you." then he looked at the Padawans, "So how are the younglings going today?"

"Well that twi'lek on number four has fired sixty shots, scored twelve hits and two kills." Kat said before she added, "And he's the best of them."

"Oh dear." Jayk said, wincing. Then he stared at Kat with a more serious expression on his face, "Look Kat, you know Jedi Vortress don't you?"

"What, Neela Vortress? Sort of. We were housed in the same dorm. I haven't spoken to her in a long time though. Her sort doesn't come down here often. You know what some of us think about blasters."

"Clumsy and random." Jayk said and Kat nodded.

"And just so uncivilised." she added.

"Well knowing what 'her sort' is is kind of why I'm here." Jayk said and Kat sighed.

"And here was me thinking this could have been the start of something highly improper Jedi Udra."

"Not today Jedi Maran. Look, this Neela Vortress took it on herself to start interrogating my Padawan about our assignment."

"Without checking with you first?" Kat asked and Jayk smiled and nodded, "Yeah that sounds like her. Never one to stand on protocol. Look Jayk if she's taking an interest in you then the best thing you can do is keep out of sight and keep your nose clean. If you've got leave owed then take it. I hear Tatooine is nice."

"No it's not."

"Maybe, but it's far, far away and that's what's important."

"Why?"

"Neela has this thing about people in positions of power who abuse it. When we were younglings she was always complaining about that sort of thing and boasting how when she became a Jedi knight she'd make sure that the ordinary beings of the galaxy could count on the Jedi Order to hold the elite to account and from what I've heard she's stuck by that. She spends her days tracking down corruption in high places – that's why she dresses like she does. You know, that dress instead of—"

"Yes, I saw. Queen of the night I've heard her look referred to as." Jayk said and that brought a smile to Kat's face.

"Hey that's good." she said, "But seriously, Neela's not someone you want on your case. I'm telling you she won't let go of any infraction, no matter how minor. She'll use it as an excuse to keep on digging and woe betide you if you do anything crazy like confront her about it."

"Ah." Jayk said and Kat frowned.

"Jayk, what did you do?" she asked.

"I may have threatened her and her Padawan with a lightsaber when she was interrogating my Padawan."

"Oh Jayk."

"From the sounds of things she may be under the impression that Brae and I have turned to the Dark Side."

Jayk said.

"So unreasonable a suggestion is that?" a voice said from behind him and Jayk immediately recognised it. "Master Yoda." he said, turning to face the jedi master and he noticed one of the temple's masked guardians standing close behind him. This was obviously for show, the six hundred and fifty year old jedi master needed no bodyguards, "Serious it is when one jedi turns against another. The spectre of the Civil War, that is."

"Master Yoda I—"

"Necessary no explanation is. Concerned for your padawan you were. But an excuse that is not, beware your attachment to your apprentice lest the fear of loss lead you down the dark path the prophecy predicts."

"Prophecy? Master Yoda I don't understand." Jayk said. Like all jedi he was well aware of the vast libraries of prophecies the archives contained but like most he paid them little attention.

"Ancient the prophecy is. Ask someone older you should." Yoda said, "But consider carefully your actions you should. Opposed making young Brae your padawan I did. Maybe right I was." and then he turned around and walked back out of the firing range. The guardian appeared to stare briefly at Jayk before he too turned around and followed Yoda.

"Someone older than Yoda?" Kat commented, "What's that supposed to mean? Are there any jedi older than him?"

"Not that I know of." Jayk said before something occurred to him, "At least none that are still alive."

"Jayk you're making about as much sense as Master Yoda." Kat said.

"Never mind. I have to be going. It was good seeing you again Kat, we should do this more often." Jayk said and then he too headed for the exit.

"Sure." Kat called out after him, "Next week I'll come to where you work and spout poodoo. Oh and make sure you watch your back Jayk. Never mind Neela's determination, anyone who can do everything a jedi has to in that dress and those heels is a force to be reckoned with."

When Jayk returned to the *Swift Exit* Tylo had the ship ready to leave, its repulsorlift engines already idling.

"Tylo," he called out as he sealed the access ramp behind him, "get us into space as quickly as you can. I want to be as far from here as possible."

"On it." Tylo responded from the cockpit and Jayk felt the *Swift Exit* rise up off the hangar floor before it accelerated out into the sky.

"Uncle what's wrong? Brae asked as she emerged from her cabin and joined him in the lounge.

"Jedi Vortress has something of a reputation,," Jayk replied, "and she has information that may paint us in a bad light and I want to find out what it is." then he walked over to a shelf where a fist sized crystalline cube sat inconspicuously. Jayk picked it up and carried it over to the table, placing it in the centre before sitting down and turning to face the centre of the room while Brae also found somewhere to sit, "Cal, I need your advice." he said and a hologram of an older man in jedi robes materialised in the middle of the lounge.

"It's always 'I need' and 'I want' with the jedi of today isn't it?" Cal Udra said, "At least Tylo knows how the art of casual conversation works."

"Cal this is serious." Jayk said.

"Okay, go on then." Cal replied, "I suppose that's what I'm here for."

"What do you know about prophecies concerning us?" Jayk asked.

"Prophecy?" Bare said, "Uncle, what is it?"

"It's where some laser brain tries to predict the future. But that's not important right now." Cal said and Jayk scowled, "Look, the only prophecy that could relate to either of you two that anyone ever mentioned to me came from one of my old superiors. A jedi master called Ben Karas became convinced that my sister and I were going to turn out to be agents of the Sith. It was all poodoo of course, though in hindsight there were one or two tiny little incidents that may have looked bad to an outside observer. But by the end of his life Master Karas had determined that Lara and I could be trusted and as far as I know he repudiated his prophecy."

"Well a jedi named Neela Vortress has got it into her head that Brae and I represent the prophecy coming true and she's decided to try and bring us down." Jayk said just as the *Swift Exit* shuddered as it entered hyperspace bound for Happ.

"Does the council know about this master?" Brae asked.

"They knew in my day." Cal said, "Though I'd have thought it would have been forgotten about by now."

"No, they know." Jayk said, "Though I don't know how long they've known for. Master Yoda told me that there was a prophecy but nothing more. He told me to ask someone older."

"Ask someone what?" Tylo asked as he appeared from inside the cockpit and sat down in the nearest seat, "What did I miss?"

"Jayk and Brae are being accused of falling to the Dark Side." Cal told him and he frowned.

"If that happens does it mean that my plea deal is up and I'll be free to go?" he said.

"More likely the judicial department will arrest you as an accessory to treason." Jayk replied.

Fear.

"Okay then," Tylo said, smiling and clapping his hands together, "how do we prove you haven't?"

"Master." Mey said as she stood in the doorway of Neela's private quarters and while Neela sat on the edge of her bed studying her datapad.

"Is the tracker secure?" she asked.

"Yes master." Mey answered, "It transmitted a vector as it entered hyperspace and will access the local communications net each time the ship drops out of hyperspace to inform us exactly where they are."

"Excellent." Neela said, getting to her feet, "In that case we have a lot of work to do. We need to be ready to leave the moment we get that information."

"What will we tell the council if they ask where we are going master?" Mey said while watching Neela gather the few possessions she needed.

"The council? The council will not intervene with our investigation as long as we operate within the code. Investigating another jedi is no different to exposing a corrupt senator or planetary leader."

4.

Happ had been colonised during the Republic's earliest years using colonial transports that lacked their own hyperdrives so instead had to be propelled through hyperspace using massive accelerators called hyperspace cannons and the now deactivated remains of the cannon that the colonists had constructed in orbit around their new home had been preserved here as a tourist attraction. As well as this the space around Happ was crowded with all manner of transport vessels carrying the products of the planet's vast industrial capacity to destinations spread across known space. Only marginally habitable when it was first settled the colonists had no reason to be overly concerned with about disrupting a native biosphere through their actions and as such large areas of the planet had become polluted to such an extent that the clouds of waste chemicals were visible from space.

"Take us in." Jayk told Tylo, "We should have clearance all the way through to the primary starport." and he got out of the co-pilot's seat and headed out of the cockpit.

"Where are you going?" Tylo asked.

"To speak to Brae." Jayk replied, "She's seemed distracted since we left Coruscant and I want to know why." Jayk found Brae in the lounge, practising with her lightsaber. The weapon was in an inactive state and she was repeating several of the basic moves taught to padawans when they were first issued with a training weapon.

"A bit simplistic for you isn't it?" he commented.

"I just wanted to be able to focus on something." Brae replied as she continued to repeat the same few movements.

"Something other than what's bothering you?" Jayk asked.

"Why do you think – Oh never mind." Brae said, knowing that Jayk had simply sensed her feelings, "Uncle do you think that the prophecy could be true? Am I going to serve the Sith?"

"Brae there is no reason to believe that." Jayk answered, trying to reassure her.

"The reason the council told you to take me as your padawan was because they were afraid that I'd fall to the Dark Side."

"Yes and they saw this as a way of preventing it Brae. The very fact that you are willing to look at yourself and question whether your actions are those that should be expected of a Jedi ought to tell you that you have not fallen. Agents of darkness have a tendency to see themselves as heroes whose actions are justified by the results."

"So as long as I'm scared of falling I'll be safe?" Brae said and Jayk smiled.

"I'd be careful of describing it that way." he said, "Fear is a path to the Dark Side itself. But I have faith that as long as you are true to yourself then you will become the great Jedi you have the potential to be. You do have an excellent teacher after all."

Brae smiled back at him.

"Yes but he's just a hologram." she replied, "The rest of the time I have to make do with someone else."

Jayk straightened up.

"Just for that let's see how well you do against a live opponent." he said and he drew and activated his lightsaber, waiting for Brae to do the same.

Happ's primary starport was a tower that extended five kilometres into the sky. The skyline of the capital was dominated by such structures though few others stretched more than two thousand metres above the surface. The starport tower was littered with internal hangars, docking ports and exterior landing pads capable of handling almost any starship in use in the Republic. Just as Jayk had said the *Swift Exit* had been given express clearance to bypass the queues of ships waiting to land and Tylo was guided towards one of the internal hangars. This was operated by the local defence force and the inside was reminiscent of the hangar in the Jedi temple owing to the types of vessels docked there. The only real difference was that there was a much higher ratio of short ranged starfighters to other craft given the role of the defence force to protect space nearby Happ.

When Jayk, Brae and Tylo disembarked from the *Swift Exit* they were met by a man in civilian clothing but with a badge that identified him as a law enforcement officer hanging on a chain around his neck.

"Jedi Udra I presume." he said in a friendly tone.

"Yes." Jayk replied.

"I'm Inspector Han Torr of the Criminal Investigation Force. I was told to expect your arrival. I'm here to show you what we found."

"Excellent." Jayk said, "Please allow me to introduce my padawan Brae and pilot Tylo Kurrast. They are both fully cleared for this investigation."

"Of course." Han said and he quickly made a note on his datapad that would ensure they were recognised by his organisation's administrative system, "Now if you'd like to come with me I can escort you to the morgue."

"Thank you. Please lead the way." Jayk said.

The city morgue was located in another of the capital's massive towers but in this case it was located in a basement level and getting there required not only two significant turbolift trips but also a trip in a similar device that operated horizontally between buildings like a form of tram system permitting travel from one tower to another without the need to step foot outside.

The morgue was staffed entirely by slender droids that moved about on wheeled bases and when he entered Inspector Torr held up his badge so that the nearest of the machines could scan the information it held.

"Welcome Inspector Torr." it said, "You have submitted a request to view body THX one one three eight. Is this correct?"

"Yes it is." Han replied and he looked at the other with him, "These people are here from the Jedi Order to identify it."

"Understood. The body is this way." the droid said and it began to glide across the floor towards the wall lined with cooled storage drawers for bodies of up to the size of most adult humanoids. As the droid neared the wall there was a 'hiss' and one of the drawers automatically slid open to reveal the covered body inside. The droid positioned itself beside the body and waited for the morgue's visitors to stand around it before pulling the sheet covering the corpse's face down to expose it.

"What happened to him?" Tylo asked when he saw the condition of the body. The skin was badly discoloured and had collapsed where the tissue beneath it had been eaten away.

"It was dragged from the river." Han said, "We're not sure how long it was in there for but it was there for several weeks at least. Cause of death has been listed as blunt force trauma. Someone hit him over the head with something that was able to crack the skull in a very localised area. The wound is octagonal in shape. In turn this caused damage to the brain that resulted in death occurring almost immediately." then as Jayk reached out to turn the head to the side Han reached out to stop him, "I wouldn't if I were you." he said, "You see how the flesh is eaten away while the skin is still intact? Well that's due to a nasty little bug we have here that's tough enough to survive in a river that has been known to catch fire every now and again. Trust me, you don't want to risk getting that on you."

"Thanks." Jayk replied.

"Can we get some gloves here?" Han asked the droid.

"Affirmative." it answered and it rolled away before returning moments later with a box of protective polymer gloves. Jayk immediately took a pair and pulled them over his hands. The gloves stretched to fit tightly and gave him the appearance of having jet black hands as he gently turned the head from side to side.

"How are we supposed to identify the body master?" Brae asked.

"Dental records or DNA would be my guess." Tylo said.

"Good luck getting any of that off this thing." Han responded, "Most of the teeth have already fallen out thanks to the gums being eaten away and the chemicals in the river have saturated the tissues enough to make gathering DNA impossible. Trust me, the river is a popular place for people looking to get rid of evidence of their crimes."

"Then how was the body discovered?" Brae asked.

"Because some people are so desperate that they'll dredge the river with a hook and line to see if they can recover anything worth selling. I'm talking about the down and outs here, not the tower dwellers with jobs." Han explained.

"This river," Jayk said, "has it been known to remove any markings from a body? Tattoos for example?"

"No, not unless the inks used are those temporary organic types that are absorbed by the body anyway. The synthetic inks aren't eaten by the bacteria."

"In that case this is not Thal N'Krey." Jayk said and he stood up straight.

"How can you tell?" Tylo asked, "His face looks like a hutt sat on it."

"Thal was a kiffar and his face was marked by tattoos that identified his clan. Look." Jayk said and he used his datapad to call up an image of Thal on its display. Below the left eye were two crescent shaped marks that to anyone with knowledge of kiffar society would be able to link with his clan. On the other hand, although it was badly discoloured and disfigured from having been in the river for so long the corpse that the Jedi had come to Happ to identify lacked any such markings.

"What about the ID?" Tylo asked, "Wasn't that how the cops here identified him in the first place?"

"That's right." Han replied, "The ID itself is in evidence storage but I have a copy here." and he used his datapad to show the others an image taken of the ID found with the body. Like the body this had been in the heavily polluted river for some time and thus was badly marked, leaving the photograph of Thal unrecognisable but the name and some of the other information just about readable.

Jayk sighed and started to peel off his gloves before tossing them into a nearby waste container.

"Well then, this has been a total waste of our time." Tylo commented.

"Maybe not." Jayk replied, "We do know that Thal came here at some point. Perhaps we can learn more by

finding out why.”

“But how master?” Brae asked and Jayk looked at Han.

“We'll need to see where the body was found.” he said.

“Okay, I can arrange that.” the inspector replied, “Though we should stop off and collect some breath masks first.”

5.

When Neela's scout ship dropped out of hyperspace she turned her attention straight to the sensor array, leaving Mey to pilot it into orbit around the planet.

"I'm picking up the tracker." she announced, "It's coming from a large structure in the capital city. Take us down."

"Yes master." Mey replied and she steered the scout ship towards Happ's atmosphere.

"Attention unidentified craft," a voice announced over the radio, "you have entered the orbital control zone of Happ. Approach no further. Identify yourself and state your reason for being here."

"I am Jedi Knight Neela Vortress aboard the scout ship *Watchful*. I am here on official business of the Jedi Order." Neela responded without taking her eyes off the sensor display that continued to point the way towards the location of the *Swift Exit*.

There was a short delay as the ground controller verified her story, checking the name *Watchful* to the transponder registered with the Bureau of Ships and Services. There was no way for him to confirm the reason for Neela's presence but the scout ship did show up as registered to the Jedi Order and there were no notifications to indicate that it could have been stolen so he decided to let it pass.

"Confirmed *Watchful*. You are cleared for priority access to our airspace. Enjoy your stay." the controller said and with a slight gesture of her hand Neela used the Force to shut off the communication channel without responding to him.

"Steer right sixteen degrees and take us down to an altitude of three thousand metres." she told Mey, "Then stay on that course until I say otherwise."

The course Neela had given Mey took them to the starport tower and the defence force hangar. Already alerted to the approach of a second Jedi vessel, an officer from the defence forces was on hand to greet the two Jedi as they disembarked from their ship.

"Greetings honoured Jedi." he said as he stood up straight, "I am Commander."

"Commander I need to know the exact location of Jedi Knight Jayk Udra and his Padawan." Neela interrupted.

"I'm sorry." the commander said in confusion, "I'm not aware of any other Jedi here." and Neela frowned.

"They arrived in that ship less than three hours ago." she said and she pointed across the bay to where the *Swift Exit* stood silent and lifeless.

"Excuse me, that vessel is here on a law enforcement matter. I don't have any information about where its occupants are."

"Then find out Commander. Oh and I will need a platoon of your men placed at my disposal."

"Of course. The defence force is happy to help the-"

"You may dispense with the pleasantries Commander. I want the crew of that ship found."

"Certainly. I'll get right on it." the commander responded and he began to tap frantically at his datapad as he searched for the information.

"Well I'm really impressed at what we've found so far out here." Tylo said, "What an amazing new smell you've discovered. I'd also like to remind you that I'm wearing a breath mask so what it must really smell like is something I hope never have to find out."

All of the party wore masks that covered their entire faces to not only keep them from inhaling atmospheric pollutants but also to protect their eyes.

"How can anyone live out here?" Brae asked when she spotted movement further along the river bank.

"Because they have nowhere else to go." Han replied, "The government does its best to make sure they have access to clean drinking water and there are charities that run clinics but life expectancy outside the towers for a humanoid is about forty years. Even if they live longer than that they tend to go blind before they choke."

"And this was where the body was found?" Jayk asked when he found drag marks leading from the water's edge.

"That's right." Han said, nodding, "A couple of scavengers pulled it out and called us."

Jayk looked at the river running beside them. Centuries of urban development had caused the bank to be reinforced by thick ferrocrete walls along much of its length but there were areas such as here where a person could climb down to an area of flat mud that led right up to the water. The surface of the water was smooth and there was little sound from the water itself, suggesting that it was deep and slow moving. Additionally if what Han had to say was true then it was highly polluted.

"This current couldn't carry a body far." he said.

"No. Typically people wanting to get rid of one will just weight it down and lower it in." Han said.

"Lower?" Tylo commented.

"Throwing a body in would create a splash and the last thing anybody wants is to get splashed by that." Han replied.

"But they left Thal's wallet in the pocket." Jayk muttered. Then he looked at Brae, "Brae, what you sense?"

"Fear. Anger." she replied, "Not concentrated but widespread."

"Exactly." Jayk said with a nod.

"What's that got to do with anything?" Tylo asked, "If I had to live my entire life out here I'd be afraid and angry about it."

"Which is why it is the sort of place that would attract someone looking for things related to fear and anger."

Jayk pointed out, "As well as those who live by such emotions."

"Master, do you mean the Sith?" Brae asked.

"I do." Jayk answered as he continued to study the river bank and his attention was drawn to a nearby foot bridge just under a hundred metres upstream, "We should start there." he added.

"Why?" Han asked.

"Why not?" Brae replied before Jayk could.

The group left the muddy area where the body had been dragged from the river and made their way along the raised bank to the bridge. This was one of many such crossing points along the river and it looked to have been built many years ago. Though a great deal of effort must have gone into constructing the bridge to last it did not look as if as much was being put into maintaining it and there were signs of corrosion all along it.

"You said the cause of death was blunt force trauma." Jayk said, "Could he have drowned instead?"

"Drowned? I suppose it's possible. After the amount of time the body's spent in the river the lungs would have filled with fluid as they were attacked. But he was struck on the head, the droids confirmed it."

"Quite, and that blow could have stunned him long enough for someone to push him over the side of the bridge. Alternatively he may just have fallen after being struck and stunned. In either case he could not call out for help."

"What makes you say that?" Tylo asked.

"Look." Jayk replied and he pointed at one of the bolts used to hold the bridge together and when Tylo looked he saw that it was octagonal in shape.

"Just like the wound the droids found." Tylo said.

"So he and someone else fought here." Han said as he looked around, "Our dead guy hit his head on a bolt and then either fell or was pushed."

"Fell seems more likely to me." Jayk said, "That's why Thal didn't take his wallet back."

"You think Thal N'Krey killed him master?" Brae said and Jayk nodded.

"I do my young apprentice." he replied, "I think the man stole Thal's wallet and got caught. Thal chased him here and they fought. During the struggle the man fell into the river and Thal was unable to get his wallet back."

"So now we need to figure out why N'Krey was here." Tylo commented.

"He was here looking for something that the Sith left behind." Jayk said.

"And he found it." Brae added.

"How do you know?" Tylo said.

"The paper." Brae told him and she looked at Jayk, "Right master?"

"Exactly." Jayk said.

"But I thought the writing on it was supposed to be gibberish. Wasn't that what your friend told you?" Tylo pointed out.

"Yes it was. But it may represent something more meaningful." Jayk suggested.

"We need to find where Thal found the original markings." Brae said and Jayk turned to look at Han.

"Inspector, what do you know about Happ's history? Specifically from the Jedi-Sith War a thousand years ago."

"I know that the Sith controlled the planet for several years but after the war the Jedi Order conducted a thorough purge to remove all their remaining influence here." Han replied.

"A purge that may have been incomplete." Jayk said, "So Brae, what do we know?"

"That whatever Thal found is too large to move. That's why he wrote down what he found." Brae said.

"A structure?" Tylo suggested.

"Most likely, yes." Jayk said, "Inspector we are looking for somewhere that could have been inhabited a thousand years ago but that was officially abandoned after the war. Perhaps due to battle damage."

"There was a major battle all around here." Han replied, "The capital had to be almost entirely rebuilt afterwards."

"That sort of reconstruction is going to need a lot of clearing of wreckage." Tylo said.

"And I doubt that it was taken away to be disposed of carefully." Brae added.

"Inspector, I need you to show us where the ruins of the old capital were taken." Jayk said.

Happ's capital had grown over the past thousand years and ground that had been outside the city as the Republic was rebuilding and restructuring itself after the Jedi-Sith War and Ruusan Reformation and now the land where the wreckage left over after the fighting was done had been dumped to make way for the reconstruction project. Over the centuries the distinct pieces of ferrocrete and steel had been eroded and smaller particles of dirt had built up in the gaps until the piles of wreckage had become an uneven landscape where only the larger pieces of wreckage could be seen penetrating the surface.

"Well this is it." Han said, "All the wreckage was brought here but as you can see there's not much left. I don't see how you plan on searching it."

"That's because you've not worked with Jedi before." Tylo responded, smiling from inside his mask. Then he looked at Jayk and added, "So how about you show him how it's done?"

"Brae head that way." Jayk said, pointing, "I'll head over in this direction and if you sense anything out of the ordinary just stop and point it out."

"Yes master." Brae replied and the two Jedi began to walk in different directions.

"What are they doing?" Han asked Tylo.

"Something to do with the Force." he answered, "They can pick up on some things made by the Sith. Don't ask me how it works though."

Just then Brae came to a sudden halt.

"Over there!" she shouted as she pointed, her voice distorted and muffled somewhat by her mask.

"I sense it too." Jayk called out back at her, "That direction." and he pointed out a direction as well. Both Jedi then began to advance in the directions they were pointing, following the disturbance they could sense in the Force.

"Come on," Tylo told Han, "don't you want to see what they've found?" and the two men set off after the Jedi. The spot where they all met up was marked by a hole in the ground where there were signs of an excavation some time ago. Exposed by the digging was what looked like a hatchway and in places around the edge of this there were carvings set into it.

Sith carvings.

"I think this is what Thal found." Jayk said as he lifted up the hatchway.

"Well whatever was there is gone now." Tylo said when all that was exposed was an empty and shallow space.

"Presumably taken by Thal." Brae said, "He wrote down the markings from the frame because it was too awkward to move."

"Exactly." Jayk said, "Which means that-" but before he could continue he was interrupted by the sound of powerful repulsorlifts coming from overhead and as the group looked up into the air they saw a defence force gunship descending over them. As this neared the ground half a dozen synthrope lines were dropped from the hatches in the side and six troopers clad in bulky armoured environment suits slid down to the ground and all aimed their weapons at the group as they spread out.

"What's going on here?" Han called out, "I am an inspector of the Criminal Investigation Force and I am operating under the authority of the Republic's judicial department."

Just then two more figures dropped from the hovering gunship though neither used one of the lines. Instead both Neela and Mey simply jumped from the vehicle and used the Force to slow their rate of fall so that they landed safely, both activating their lightsabers the moment that they touched the ground. Incredibly Neela still wore the formal looking dress even out here in the polluted wastelands of Happ and it looked distinctly out of place compared to everyone else's more practical clothing.

"Stand down Jedi Udra." Neela ordered, "You are under arrest."

"Arrest for what?" Jayk demanded as he rested his hand on his lightsaber but kept it on his belt to avoid provoking either Neela or any of the soldiers around him.

"Suspicion of treason." Neela replied, "According to my sources you weren't sent here to do anything other than identify a body. So how do you explain being out here standing next to something made by the Sith?"

"We were following a lead Neela." Jayk said, "Besides whatever was in this hole is gone now. You're welcome to check for yourself."

"Oh I will. But only after you're under lock and key so I can be sure you haven't taken anything."

Jayk looked around at the others in his group.

"When I give the word I want you all to run. Get back to that bridge and I'll join you there." he said.

"What's wrong? I don't understand what's going on." Han replied.

"The queen of the night over there has got into her head that Jayk and Brae are Sith." Tylo told him, "and I don't think she's open to a reasonable discussion on the subject. It's best that we just run and hope Jayk can deal with her."

"Okay then." Han said, nodding.

"Ready when you are master." Brae added as she too reached for her lightsaber.

"No Brae. You go as well." Jayk said, "I must do this alone." and then he started to walk towards Neela.

"Stay back Jedi Udra." she called out sternly, raising her lightsaber into a defensive posture.

"No chance Neela. You've overstepped your authority here." Jayk replied before he drew and ignited his lightsaber with a 'snap-hiss' and at the same time he yelled, "Now!"

The others in his group immediately turned to run in the opposite direction. There was a soldier in the way who raised his weapon to try and head them off but Brae instinctively let out a powerful telekinetic wave that set debris flying towards him before picking him up off his feet and hurling him backwards, allowing them to escape through the gap in the squad's perimeter that this opened up.

"Open fire!" the defence force squad leader ordered over the squad's communication net and several blaster bolts were unleashed towards Jayk who swatted all of them aside harmlessly, taking care to make sure that they did not hit anyone by accident.

"No!" Neela yelled, "I'll deal with him, you go after the others." and she charged at Jayk, swinging her lightsaber at him as soon as he came within striking distance.

Jayk parried this blow and Neela struck again, only for this attack to be blocked as well.

"You can't win Neela." Jayk said, "We're too evenly matched."

"I don't need to beat you." she hissed at him, "All I need to do is prevent you from helping your co-conspirators escape. Mey is more than a match for your apprentice."

6.

Pursued by Mey and the defence force troops and with the gunship watching from above them Brae, Tylo and Han ran towards the river. This took them through places inhabited by some of those unfortunate enough to have to live outside the towers and these beings panicked when they saw the armed and armoured troops charging after them, worried that they could have been sent to clear out the crude shanty town.

"There!" Brae shouted as the river appeared in front of her, "The bridge is just up ahead."

"Great. So now what?" Tylo asked.

"Just get to the bridge and get behind me." Brae replied and Tylo and Han did as they were told, rushing headlong onto the bridge after Brae and slipping past her so that she was between them and their pursuers.. Then she drew her lightsaber and activated it just as Mey and the soldiers reached the bridge.

"Surrender Brae." Mey said as she and the soldiers came to a stop, unwilling to advance across the relatively narrow bridge while Brae was blocking their way.

"Why? Why not just come and get us?" Brae responded as she and the two men behind her backed away slowly.

Jayk and Neela continued to duel with Jayk concentrating on just blocking Neela's attacks while Neela sought to prevent him from being able to disengage and join the others in his group. But Jayk knew that this could not go on forever and eventually he was going to have to do something to break the stalemate. He did not want to inflict a serious injury on Neela if he could help it though, such an act would make things more difficult to explain to the Jedi Order and so he looked for an alternative.

This alternative came in the form of a metal bar that he saw sticking up out of the ground and he reached out his free hand to summon it to his grasp through the Force. Flying through the air towards him Jayk caught the bar and used it as an additional weapon, swinging it at Neela's knee from the side. The sudden attack caught her off guard and she let out a cry of pain as she fell to the ground and her lightsaber fell from her hands. Jayk immediately dropped the bar and instead scooped up Neela's weapon before he began to run after the others, leaving Neela behind to struggle back to her feet.

All of a sudden Mey charged and lunged towards Brae with her lightsaber held out directly in front of her, intending to impale the other padawan. But Brae reacted quickly enough to dodge the attack and a sideways swing of her lightsaber pushed Mey's aside so that it struck the ancient safety railing of the bridge and sliced right through it. Rather than risk being caught in her side by Brae, Mey backed off instead and attempted another strike from Brae's front that she was able to parry as well. Pulling back, Mey struck again repeatedly and Brae was forced to parry one blow after another to avoid being sliced in two.

It was while the two padawans were locked in their duel that Jayk appeared with a lightsaber in each hand and he ignited them both as he faced off against the squad of troops that now turned to face him.

"Back away." he told them but they held their position.

"What's the matter Jayk?" Neela said from behind him and he turned so that he could see both her and the soldiers, holding one lightsaber in the direction of each, "Is your little scheme not working?"

"Better than yours I think." Jayk said as he watched Neela walked around him, limping slightly from the blow to her knee he had inflicted, "Your padawan doesn't seem to be as capable as you claimed. I'd say that Brae is holding her own quite well. Now my guess is that you didn't clear your little trip here with the Jedi Order and they'll asking questions about where you are. Now how long do you think it will be before they guess you came after me and contact the authorities here? All Brae and I need to do is hold out until then."

As if some higher power in the galaxy had been waiting for Jayk to say this the defence force squad leader suddenly raised a hand to the side of his head as he received a transmission from his superiors.

"Please repeat that control. Did you say stand down?" he said, his voice audible to everyone close by.

"Game over Neela." Jayk said.

"Not yet it isn't. I don't need them to take you down." she replied and using the Force she tore the rifle from the grip of one of the soldiers, pulling it to her own hands. Jayk reacted by holding both the lightsabers in his hands up in front of him in a cross pattern for maximum protection.

"You know that's not going to work on me." he warned her as he saw her switch the setting to stun, obviously still intent on capturing rather than killing.

"Not you no. But maybe your padawan." Neela replied as she spun around to face the bridge.

"Brae look out!" Jayk yelled and Brae leapt backwards just in time to avoid being hit as Neela opened fire.

Mey on the other hand was less fortunate. As Brae retreated she advanced to keep up the pressure on her and the stun blast hit her in the thigh. Using the Force to focus her mind she was able to avoid the paralysing pulse from knocking her unconscious but she could not prevent herself from losing all feeling in her leg and

she stumbled sideways into the safety railing right where her lightsaber blade had already damaged it. Now unable to take her weight the railing gave way and Mey fell from the bridge into the river where she let out a scream that was suddenly cut off as her breath mask was ripped from her face and she disappeared beneath the surface.

"No!" Neela exclaimed as she watched her padawan vanish

On the bridge Brae, Tylo and Han rushed to the side and looked over into the water while on the shore Jayk and the soldiers rushed to the ferrocrete lined bank to see if they could see the unfortunate young woman.

"Sergeant," Jayk said to the squad leader, "can you get your gunship down here to lower a line down?"

"It's too late." Han responded, "She's gone under without a sealed suit. She's probably already dead. If not she soon will be."

Jayk looked across the bridge to where Brae looked back at him.

"Brae can you sense-" he began before Brae shook her head and he stopped speaking.

"No! She's alive!" Neela screamed as she ran to the river bank and dropped to her knees as she looked down into the polluted water.

"Jedi Vortress," the squad leader said, approaching her, "Perhaps you should come with us. We'll send a team to recover the body."

"Get away from me!" Neela yelled pushing the squad leader back.

"I think perhaps we should leave Neela for now." Jayk said as he shut off the lightsabers and returned his own to his belt while tossing the other towards Neela so that it landed beside her.

Anger.

Rage.

Hatred.

Neela looked around at Jayk as everyone began to withdraw away from her, heading back towards the nearest entrance to one of the city's towers.

"You did this Jayk Udra! This is your fault! You'll pay for this I swear."

Jayk, Brae and Tylo stood together in the council chamber as Jayk gave his report on everything that had happened from the moment he had been told Neela had taken Brae for questioning up to the death of Mey.

"Unfortunate this is." Yoda said, "Dead a padawan is and missing her master is."

"Missing?" Jayk said, "But Jedi Vortress was alive and well when we last saw her."

"Perhaps." Grand Master Ress replied, "But although the government of Happ has confirmed that she left their world about an hour after you did she has not returned here to give account of her actions."

"She didn't seem very happy with us when we last saw her." Tylo commented, "You don't think that she'll do something stupid like try and come after us do you?"

"A possibility that is." Yoda said, "Prepared for it we should be."

"In the mean time we are listing Neela Vortress as a rogue." the grand master said, "Republic worlds will be alerted to watch for her and she will be taken into custody if she returns here. But for now this matter is closed. There is no evidence that either Jayk or Brae Udra have broken the jedi code and they are to continue with their assignment. And may the Force be with you."