

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

5-08: SCHEMES & TRUTH

BY STEPHEN J DUTTON



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Neela Vortress lures the Udras to a nexus of the dark side, believing that this will expose them as having fallen. When they finally confront one another though a more surprising truth is revealed...

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1.

Jedi Knight Jayk Udra exhaled as he sat down on the side of his bed in his quarters within the Jedi temple on Coruscant and almost immediately there was a knock at his door.

"Come in." he said and the door slid open to reveal a female Jedi standing outside, "Kat, we didn't arrange to meet did we?" he asked as she entered the room and sat down beside him on the bed.

"No but I was walking by the communications centre after my class at the firing range and they've just received a transmission that you ought to know about.

"Is it about Tylo?" Jayk asked and Kat nodded.

"He's fine Jayk." she told him.

"That's a relief. Do we know what happened?" Jayk responded, happy to hear that the former smuggler who had been transporting him around the galaxy for the past two years had reappeared safe and sound after being abducted by Neela Vortress, a fallen Jedi with a grudge against Jayk and his Padawan Brae. Brae was also Jayk's daughter from a relationship he had had while on an extended assignment and his pairing with her as master and Padawan had led to Neela's fall.

"Not everything but he did say that he was able to escape from Neela by stealing the ship she was using. Unfortunately it's damaged and they won't reach Coruscant for another five days yet." Kat said and Jayk frowned.

"They? Don't tell me he managed to capture Neela." he said.

"No such luck. Now his message didn't mention anyone else with him but he also sent a large data packet on a secondary channel that was aimed at the *Swift Exit*. Now either he's still unaware that the Jedi Order has been monitoring all his private communications since he entered into his deal to ferry you and Brae around or he wanted us to see this as well." Kat said and she handed Jayk a datapad, "I should warn you that you'll find some explicit material in there."

"I seem to have found it." Jayk replied as he started browsing through the images Tylo had sent to his own ship's computer, "Do we know who this woman is?" he added.

"From some of the file names we think she's called Zara Rosk and in more than five hundred images and over sixty video clips there is not one where she is wearing even a single item of clothing. Although there are some where she is wearing binders."

"So Tylo either has a new girlfriend or he has procured the services of a woman for hire for his trip back here. Hopefully this woman will not suffer the same misfortune that all of his previous girlfriends that we have encountered have suffered." Jayk said before there was another knock at his door, "Come in." he called out again and this time when the door opened Brae was standing outside and Jayk quickly hid the datapad screen from his teenage daughter.

"Dad the council wants to see us." she said before noticing that he was holding a datapad out of her view,

"What have you got there?" she asked.

"It is a transmission from Tylo. You will be glad to know that he is obviously in good health and on his way back here. He won't be back for several days yet but he apparently has plenty to occupy his time."

"Let me see." Brae said holding out her hand.

"The council has summoned us." Jayk said, getting to his feet and then he turned towards Kat and added, "Are you coming as well? If it's an assignment we might be able to get you away from the firing range for a few days."

"To quote a video clip I saw recently I'll do anything." Kat replied as she got up as well and joined Jayk in walking down the hallway outside his quarters towards the nearest turbolift. Brae followed close behind and while neither of the Jedi knights were watching she subtly took the datapad that Jayk had tucked into a large pouch on his belt.

Inside the turbolift Jayk selected the floor at the very top of the temple's central tower where the council chamber was located and the car began to ascend. Meanwhile Brae kept behind Jayk and Kat so she could examine the datapad and her eyes widened when she saw what it contained. However, as she scrolled through the files she came to a video instead of a still image and instead of scrolling she inadvertently pressed 'play' just as the turbolift came to a halt and the doors slid open.

"Please Tylo, you can do anything you want with me." the voice of Zara Rosk said and both Jayk and Kat turned to face Brae as she quickly tried to stop the video playing back.

"Brae you shouldn't be watching that. How did you even get it without me noticing?" Jayk asked as he snatched the datapad away from his daughter.

"Tylo taught me how to pick pockets." she said.

"The information on this is private." Jayk pointed out.

"Secrets from one another the Jedi should avoid unless absolutely necessary it is. Examine the datapad I will." a voice said from outside the turbolift and Jayk winced.

"Master Yoda is right behind me isn't he?" he said and both Brae and Kat nodded, "Of course Master Yoda." Jayk said, turning around again and looking down at the diminutive Jedi Master who held up his hand for Jayk to give him the datapad.

"Waiting for you the council is. Follow me you will." Yoda said when he had the datapad in his hand and he turned around and walked towards the nearby door that was guarded by a pair of masked and armoured temple guardians.

Inside the council chamber eleven other Jedi Masters including Grand Master Karadon Ress sat around the edge of the room and while Yoda took his seat among them the Udras and Kat stood in the centre of the room.

"Jedi Maran, you were not summoned." Grand Master Ress said, the large human looking at Kat.

"Grand Master I suggested that Jedi Maran join us. She has accompanied Brae and I on missions before and she happened to be with me when Brae informed me of your summons. She had brought me word of Tylo Kurrast."

"Who entertaining himself well he appears to be." Yoda commented before tossing the datapad back to Jayk.

"Perhaps the assistance of an additional Jedi may be of benefit in this assignment." Karadon Ress said.

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

"Master Oran." the grand master added and he looked at one of his fellow council members, a green skinned Twi'lek female.

"What do you know of the outpost the Jedi Order maintains on Lesser Tristos?" she asked.

"I have no knowledge of the world." Jayk admitted.

"A place we discuss often it is not." Yoda said, "Great darkness there is there."

"I don't like the sound of that." Kat said.

"There is only limited communication between the outpost and the temple itself. The less it is mentioned in our communications logs the better." Master Oran continued, "However, two hours ago they sent a priority signal that someone had attempted to breach their perimeter. From the description it could have been Teron Sharr."

Teron Sharr was a young human male who was Force sensitive. Unfortunately he had been able to avoid being discovered by the Jedi Order as an infant and had instead ended up as a petty criminal. Unfortunately his criminal behaviour made it easy for him to become an agent of the Dark Side when someone he managed to acquire some training in the use of his powers. He had now spent two years trying to expand his knowledge and power base, most recently by taking over elements of the galaxy's criminal underworld. Attacking a Jedi outpost would not be unheard of for him either.

"I take it that the outpost's defences are unlikely to be able to repel a strong assault." Jayk said.

"Strong the outpost defences are. Thirty Jedi plus staff there are present." Yoda said.

"Including a force of guardians." Oran added, "But they are needed to protect the outpost itself. The existence of the outpost has been hidden from the local population and to have the staff hunting for Teron Sharr openly would risk exposing it."

"Whereas a team of Jedi sent directly from Coruscant can go anywhere to track him down." Jayk said.

"Correct you are Jedi Udra." Yoda said.

"Jedi Udra you are to take your Padawan and Jedi Maran to Lesser Tristos. You should liaise with Jedi Master Selene Priam, the senior Jedi at the temple who will provide you with all the information they have on Teron Sharr's attempted break in. Then find him and take him into custody." Grand Master Ress told Jayk.

"Yes Master." Jayk replied.

"Now go and may the Force be with you." the grand master added.

Jayk, Brae and Kat made the journey from Coruscant to Lesser Tristos in arrow shaped starfighters, each fitted with an external hyperspace ring that they detached upon entering the system.

"I have the beacon for Lesser Tristos sixteen million kilometres ahead of us." Kat said.

"Confirmed but there's no beacon for the outpost, not even on any of the restricted channels." Brae added.

"Then whatever is there must be important enough that the Jedi Order doesn't want to risk exposure even by chance." Jayk said, "I have the co-ordinates that the council gave us. Follow my lead, deactivate IFF transponders and do not respond to communication from the civilian authorities." he ordered before he turned his fighter towards the location he had been given for the secret Jedi outpost on the planet.

The trio of Jedi craft flew towards the planet at top speed, slowing down just before entering the atmosphere close to where the outpost was located. This was located on a remote island, part of a cluster of small islands far from any of the major landmasses and the three Jedi flew their fighters in a side by side formation towards it low enough over the ocean that the repulsorlift fields created large amounts of spray behind them.

It was only at the last moment that the outpost became visible, a squat fortress set into the side of a mountain. Most of the structure was concealed within the mountain itself while just a landing pad extended out and even this was painted with a camouflage pattern to make detection from the air more difficult. "I have the pad dead ahead, beginning landing cycle." Jayk said as he prepared to set his fighter down on the landing pad.

As his craft descended he saw a number of figures appear from inside the outpost, waiting beside the entrance until all three fighters had touched down before advancing towards them. None of the faces of any of the figures were visible, instead each one wore a mask that hid their features along with matching armour. As was to be expected they all carried lightsabers, holding them in front of themselves as they formed a line. These were longer than the standard types carried by Jayk, Brae and Kat and when the guardians had formed their line they all activated their weapons simultaneously so that their twin blades extended upwards and downwards at the same time.

"This is a restricted facility." one of the guardians said from behind his mask as the newly arrived Jedi disembarked from their fighters, "Your presence here is unauthorised."

"We're here on council orders." Brae replied, "Let us pass."

"No-one enters the citadel without written authorisation." the guardian said and in unison the entire row of masked and armoured figures adopted a fighting stance.

"I have our authorisation here." Jayk said, producing a datapad on which he called up their mission instructions and held it out.

The lead guardian promptly deactivated his lightsaber and hooked it back on his belt as he took the datapad to examine it.

"This appears genuine." he said, "You will come with me to Master Priam. She will decide what is to be done with you." he said. Then without returning the datapad to Jayk he turned around and the other guardians separated into two rows that their leader walked between to get back inside the outpost. Jayk, Brae and Kat all followed the guardian and behind them the others closed in again to follow them in turn with their lightsabers still active and held ready to use.

"Not taking any chances are they?" Kat whispered to Jayk.

"Whatever is being protected here must be very important." he replied.

"So where are all the other staff who are supposed to be here?" Brae added as they were led further into the outpost without anyone other than the guardians escorting them coming into view. Brae did not even sense the presence nearby of anyone else.

"Perhaps keeping watch for Teron Sharr coming back." Jayk suggested before the guardian ahead of them stopped beside a large door and opened it.

"I have brought the intruders master." the guardian said as he entered the room that contained a plain looking desk behind which sat a grey haired human woman with four more guardians standing behind her. It was clear to Jayk, Brae and Kat that this was Jedi Master Selene Priam.

"Excellent. Bring them in and let them explain themselves." she replied.

"They claim to have orders to be here master. They had this." the guardian added, handing her the datapad Jayk had given him and she looked at the screen.

"Very good commander. Leave us." she ordered and the guardian turned around and exited the room, leaving Jayk, Brae and Kat facing Selene and the four guardians as the door slid shut behind them.

"Are we prisoners?" Brae asked.

"Prisoners do not generally have the luxury of being permitted to carry weapons padawan." Selene said while she read the datapad, "And you should address me as 'master'."

"Master Priam as you can see the council instructed us to come here." Jayk told Selene.

"In response to your call for assistance." Kat added.

"We require no assistance." Selene said.

"Master Priam I'm sure your staff are very capable but against Teron Sharr and-" Jayk began.

"Who is Teron Sharr?" Selene interrupted.

Confusion.

Jayk suddenly sensed a change in Brae's emotional state and glanced at her. He had thought that she was unable to understand why Selene was acting as if she had never contacted the Jedi Council. However, he saw that she was looking beyond the seated Jedi Master at the guardians behind her who so far had remained silent and motionless.

"Jedi Udra I asked you a question." Selene said and Jayk looked back towards her.

"Teron Sharr is an agent of the Dark Side who we believe is attempting to resurrect the Sith. He is the individual who attempted to break in here two days ago." Jayk told her.

"That makes no sense. The Sith are extinct and have been for centuries, In addition no-one has attempted to break into this facility in the last two days, two weeks or even the seven years I have been in charge here. In fact you three are the first unexpected visitors we have had since then." Selene said.

"That's not possible. The Council told us you sent for help." Kat said.

"As I said, no such signal was sent. Obviously there had been some sort of mistake and now it falls to me to decide what is to be done about it. The three of you will be given quarters where you will remain until I can get to the bottom of this." Selene said and then she activated the intercom on her desk, "Commander can you come back in here?" she said and the door to her office slid open again to allow the guardian who had escorted the trio from the landing pad to enter once more.

"Master Priam." he said.

"Commander Jedi Udra, Jedi Maran and Padawan Udra are to be provided with suitable quarters." Selene told him.

"They have been prepared already master." the guardian replied.

"Good." Selene said before she looked at the new arrivals again, "Your quarters will be sealed. I take it that I can trust you not to attempt to break out and wander around this facility?" she said.

"You can master." Jayk replied.

"Very good. The commander will take you there now." Selene said.

2.

Jayk, Brae and Kat were taken from Selene's office to a set of chambers where they were left alone by the guardians. These chambers were clearly intended as living quarters but they still had the same plain appearance as most such rooms used by the Jedi Order. There was a single hexagonally shaped central lounge and a total of five small bedrooms each with its own bathroom facilities leading off from this, one bedroom leading off from each wall while the entrance to the chambers was on the sixth. As soon as this closed a display beside the door indicated that it had just been locked from the outside.

"Well now we are prisoners. Even if we do still have our weapons." Kat commented before she sat down.

"Quite." Jayk agreed as he sat beside her and it was then that he noticed a security camera mounted in a corner, "We are also being watched." he added

"You're very quiet about all of this Brae." Kat said, looking over to Brae.

"Brae is trying to determine what it is that she sensed in Master Priam's office." Jayk said and then he smiled at his daughter and added, "Am I right Brae?"

"Yes father." Brae said and she too sat down opposite Jayk and Kat.

"I didn't sense anything odd." Kat said.

"Neither did I." Jayk said, "But of course Brae's senses are far greater than ours. She just lacks control over them. Perhaps you should tell us what it is that is troubling you."

"How many people were in that room?" Brae asked.

"Apart from us you mean? Master Selene and four guardians, so five of them in total. Plus us makes eight."

Kat said but Brae shook her head.

"No, I sensed someone else. Something else perhaps but it was alive and I'm pretty certain that it was behind Master Selene among the guardians. There were five people behind her, not four and I've got a very bad feeling about that." Brae said.

Selene was joined by the guardian commander just as she was about to enter the outpost's main command centre.

"Commander are our guests secure?" she asked and the masked man nodded.

"Yes Master Priam. What do you think of them? Their story does not sound plausible to me." he responded.

"It doesn't to me either. However, This datapad appears genuine which means the council may have sent them here for some reason. In any case we can't hold them indefinitely and we need to inform the temple of Coruscant that they are here." Selene told him as they walked up to the communication station where one of the outpost's technical staff sat. Although the technician was not a Jedi knight the man was a member of the Service Corps, the Jedi order's support body made up of former padawans who had failed the trials to become fully fledged knights but wished to continue serving the order.

"I need a holonet connection to Coruscant." Selene told the technician and the man nodded.

"Yes master." he said but then he frowned.

"Is something wrong?" Selene asked.

"I'm sorry master but I can't connect to the antenna." the technician replied.

"Is there a fault registered in the system?" the guardian commander asked.

"No commander, according to my panel everything is functional but I still can't get a connection." the technician told him.

"An interesting malfunction." the guardian commander said, looking at Selene, "Who knows how long we have been cut off from the rest of the galaxy? Though I suspect about two days."

"The time that our guests claim we contacted the Jedi Order to request help you mean?" Selene replied and the commander nodded.

"Yes master." he said and Selene turned to the technician.

"Go down to the antenna itself and check the connection If it's damaged I want to know exactly what's been done to it and how long it's been that way. Understand?" she told the man.

"Yes Master Priam." he said, getting up out of his seat and making his way calmly from the room.

"Should I have guards placed outside our guests' quarters?" the guardian commander suggested but Selene shook her head.

"No, I don't think that will be necessary. The door is locked and any attempt to leave their quarters will be detected." she said.

"I think we should consult Cal. Maybe he knows about this place." Brae suggested.

"You think it's been here for four millennia?" Kat asked and Brae shrugged.

"I don't know but in a lifetime serving the Jedi Order he must have learned a few secrets we aren't privy to." she answered.

"There is of course the issue that Cal may refuse to tell us." Jayk pointed out, "Although he is the most accurate recreation of the original Cal Udra he is still just the AI gatekeeper of Cal's holocron and he may have been programmed to keep secrets from us."

"I heard that." a voice said from beneath Brae's robes and she reached inside them to take out the crystalline cube she had there, at which point a hologram of an older man in Jedi robes appeared beside Jayk. This was what they knew as Cal Udra, a virtual recreation of one of Jayk and Brae's ancestors from more than three thousand years earlier.

"I was merely-" Jayk began.

"I know, who knows what the original Cal programmed me to do?" Cal interrupted, "However, I can honestly say that I don't know anything about this place. Remember that in my day we couldn't travel the length and breadth of the galaxy in just a few weeks or days. It took months and normally we were forced into following routes laid down by hyperspace beacons. Ships with full nav computers were few and far between." then he smiled and added, "Of course I could have been programmed to say that."

"So do you know anything about becoming invisible Cal?" Kat said.

"Ah, I take it we're discussing the mysterious fifth person Brae sensed behind Master Priam? Again that's something I don't know anything about. There were a few ships that had cloaking devices around as I understand but nothing on a personal level."

"Besides which there remains the question of why only Brae could sense them and no-one else." Jayk said.

"Have you considered that it was just you and Kat that couldn't sense them?"

"You mean Master Priam and her guardians were lying?" Kat said.

"Exactly." Cal said, "They could have been working together to hide someone from your perceptions. Of course since Brae is much stronger in the Force doing so to her would be harder."

All of a sudden there was a chiming sound from the entrance to their chambers and the Jedi all turned towards the door, expecting it to open and one of the base staff to enter. However, the door remained closed.

"I think the door just unlocked itself." Jayk said, getting up and walking over to check the control panel beside it. Sure enough this now indicated that the door was unlocked and could be opened from their side.

Reaching out for the panel Jayk was about to open the door when he suddenly pulled his hand back.

"Dad what's wrong?" Brae asked as she and Kat approached him from behind.

"This could be a test." Jayk said.

"You mean to see if we'd attempt to escape?" Kat asked and Jayk nodded.

"Yes. I think perhaps we should go and sit down again. Is anyone hungry? I know I could use a snack. Let's see what the outpost offers in the way of cuisine shall we?"

The technician followed the communication line towards the outpost's holonet antenna. Although seldom used this allowed the outpost direct real time communications with almost anywhere in the Republic and it was considered a vital piece of equipment. In the interests of security the antenna could only be accessed from the command centre and as such the data line was one continuous run of optical fibre. This was supposedly monitored for breaks but the fact that the communication console showed no errors when the antenna could not be accessed showed that this system had failed somewhere so the technician stopped at each link between the different lengths of fibre used. At these he could plug into the system and send a test signal back to the command centre, waiting for a response to confirm that there were no breakages. He continued this process all the way to the antenna when he encountered the final connection point of the fibre link. This differed from the others in that it was where the link actually connected to the antenna instead of just joining two successive lengths of fibre and it was housed in a much larger wall mounted enclosure. The entire two metre tall front of this enclosure was hinged and the technician opened it up to inspect the electronics inside, gasping when he saw what was inside.

The optical fibre line from the command centre had obviously been deliberately disconnected from the antenna and instead plugged into a small black box that the technician suspected was sending the false connection data back to his console. More concerning than this though was the portable computer that had been hooked into the antenna in place of the optical fibre line from the command centre. The markings on this suggested that it had been taken from the outpost's own stores and the implication was that with it connected to the antenna then anyone could access the holonet antenna and break the outpost's standing communications blackout, sending signals anywhere they wanted while everyone else remained unaware that anything was wrong.

All of a sudden the technician felt a chill as despite his limited ability to manipulate the Force he sensed a disturbance and he stepped back from the open enclosure and looked down the passageway he had just come down. The only source of illumination he had was his own glow rod and this cast insufficient light for him to be able to see more than a few metres along the passageway so he called out instead.

"Hello? Is someone there?" he said but there was no response.

Deciding that the tremor was false, a result of his own imagination, he then turned back to the contents of the enclosure and he began to disconnect the computer from the antenna with the intention of handing it over to Master Priam. However, before he could finish there was a familiar 'snap-hiss' sound as someone activated a lightsaber right behind the open enclosure door where the technician could not see them. The lightsaber was held with its emitter against the centre of the door and the extending blade punched right through the lightweight material before impaling the unfortunate technician as well. Killed instantly as the blade pierced both his lungs and his heart, the technician collapsed in a heap and at the same time there was a second 'snap-hiss' as his killer shut off the lightsaber again.

3.

The door to the chambers Jayk, Brae and Kat were waiting in slid open unexpectedly to reveal Selene and half a dozen of the outpost's guardians, their double bladed lightsabers activated, both blades glowing brightly.

"Master Priam." Jayk said as he, Brae and Kat got to their feet when she and the guardians entered.

"Jedi Udra why is this door unlocked?" she responded.

"We thought you did it as a test." Brae said.

"We haven't left these rooms since your guardian commander left us here." Kat added.

"Is that so?" Selene said.

"It is." Cal said, his hologram suddenly appeared.

Surprise.

Selene had not expected the Udras to have a holocron with them. Each device was unique and considered a priceless relic of the Jedi Order. This meant that it was rare for the council to give permission for them to be removed from the safety of the temple archives.

"Master Priam please allow me to introduce Cal Udra, assigned by the Jedi Council to advise myself and my padawan." Jayk said, "Perhaps you could explain why you clearly think we are lying to you."

"I think it's easier to show you. Come with me." Selene replied and with a gesture she signalled to the guardians to shut off their lightsabers.

Selene then began to lead Jayk, Brae and Kat down into the lower levels of the outpost, guiding them through a number of service passages and as they went deeper Brae felt a shiver run down her spine.

"I don't like it down here." she said, "Something doesn't feel right."

"Could you be more specific?" Kat asked.

"It's the Dark Side. The deeper we go the more I can feel it all around me." Brae said.

"I don't sense anything." Kat commented.

"It's not very strong but I swear it's everywhere." Brae replied before Selene pointed down the passageway to where lights could be seen ahead of them.

"This is it." she said, "This might explain why your padawan can sense the Dark Side." and she continued to lead the Udras and Kat along the passageway until they came to the holonet antenna assembly where the body of the technician was still lying sprawled out on the floor. There were four members of the base staff present as well, two more guardians and two beings wearing the same service division robes as the dead technician. One of these was crouched beside the body and wore a healer's badge while the second was another technician who was busy inspecting the antenna for damage.

"What happened to him?" Kay asked when she saw the body.

"He was killed by some sort of energy attack, either a powerful blaster or a lightsaber." the healer replied.

"From the way the attack seems to have gone through the door of the antenna junction box I'm assuming that it was a lightsaber. A blaster bolt would disperse on impact and cause more surface damage to the door." Selene said.

"Plus nearly everyone around here seems to have a lightsaber." Brae commented.

"Why was he down here?" Jayk asked as he crouched down beside the body as well. He could tell from the burn marks to the side that the dead man had probably been accessing the contents of the junction box enclosure himself when he was killed, the killer using the open door as cover for their approach.

"I sent him down to check on a fault with the holonet transmitter." Selene answered, "My intention was to verify your explanation for coming here when he discovered that despite our system claiming the transmitter was working we could not establish a connection."

"I'm guessing he found out why and someone killed him to keep it quiet." Kay said.

"Master Priam." the technician said suddenly, stepping away from the junction box.

"You have something to report?" Selene asked.

"Yes master. The antenna has been sabotaged. We can neither send nor receive until key parts are replaced."

"And do we have those in stores?" Selene said.

"Yes master. There are parts to make an entire second antenna although they are in the restricted section of the stores." the technician told her.

"Why restrict spare parts for an antenna?" Brae said.

"Presumably to make certain that no-one can make themselves a transmitter and reveal the existence of this place." Jayk suggested and then he looked at Selene and added, "Am I right?"

"Quite right Jedi Udra. I trust my staff but standing orders from the council insist that any equipment that could expose us if misused is kept under lock and key. Only I and my chief technical officer have access to it." Selene said.

"Master I think we must face the fact that someone here at the outpost is a murderer." the healer pointed out and she looked towards the Udras and Kat.

"If you've got an accusation to make then make it." Brae said, glaring at the other woman.

"Master Priam we were in our chambers when this killing happened." Jayk said and Selene nodded.

"Yes, I believe you Jedi Udra and that leads me to the unpleasant conclusion that one of my own people did this." she said.

"Or maybe not." Jayk commented and Selene frowned.

"Would you care to expand on that Jedi Udra?" she said.

"Tell me Master Priam, do any of your staff here possess the ability to shroud themselves from view?" Jayk asked.

"You mean become invisible? No, in fact in all my years as a Jedi I don't think I've ever encountered anyone who could manage that." she said.

"They wouldn't be very good at it if you saw them." Brae muttered.

"Remember your place padawan." Selene said sternly.

"Master Priam I suspect that someone has infiltrated your facility. They sabotaged your transmitter, killed the technician and also sent a false message to the council to lure us here." Jayk said.

"We've never encountered anyone who could make themselves invisible either." Brae pointed out.

"No which means they may be using more mundane means to hide. Such as finding somewhere that keeps them out of view." Jayk said, "Of course it might be easier to figure out what was going on if we knew a little more about the purpose of this place. Master Priam why is this outpost here and why is it so secret?"

Selene sighed.

"We have a nexus here Jedi Udra." she said.

"A Force nexus?" Brae responded in surprise, "I take it you don't mean a Light Side one. That must be what I was sensing."

A nexus was a point in space where the Force was unusually strong. These tended towards either the Light or Dark sides and any use of the Force around them was made much easier providing it matched the same aspect as the nexus."

"No. At some point in the distant past this planet was home to a Sith sorcerer who used his power to warp living creatures into weapons. Whether he used the nexus to amplify his power or he brought it into being by his activities is something we will never know, but the nexus is still here." Selene explained.

"Maybe one of your staff got too close for too long and they've turned." Brae suggested.

"No. The nexus itself cannot be reached. Even the shaft that leads down to it has been sealed behind a blast door for centuries." Selene said.

"I still believe that there is someone here who should not be. Aside from us of course. Jayk said, "Whoever it is must have some knowledge of the outpost though to even get here themselves, let alone get inside and draw us here as well."

"So how do we find them dad?" Brae asked.

"I recommend a three pronged approach. Thorough search of the outpost's records for any historical intrusion attempts as well as a full list of Jedi who have ever been assigned here and also a physical search of the island to try and find out how the intruder arrived here as well as the one other place we know the intruder had been apart from here." Jayk said.

"And where would that be Jedi Udra?" Selene asked and Jayk looked at Brae.

"The office where you first spoke to us." she said, smiling, "I sensed someone else standing right behind you."

Leaving the service tunnels and returning to the upper regions of the outpost Selene summoned a nearby guardian.

"This guardian can take on of you to where they can study our records." she said.

"I'll go." Kat suggested, "Let's face it I'm much more of a checking records sort of woman than a field investigator."

"As you wish. But be careful." Jayk responded before they separated, the guardian leading Kat to a suitable computer access terminal while Selene and her own unit of guardians took the Udras back to the office they had first met in.

"As far as I know this is the only way in or out of this room." Selene said.

"What about the ventilation system?" Jayk asked as he and Brae crossed the room to study the wall behind the desk at which Selene had sat during their first meeting.

"Ah yes the old idea of bypassing the strictest security by knocking on the front door and claiming to be there to fix the air conditioning." Selene commented, "Thankfully the designer of this facility was smart enough to

make sure that that was not possible here. All of the ducts are designed to be too small for an adult humanoid to crawl along. Even your padawan wouldn't fit."

"Perhaps but there are other species who can fit through incredibly narrow gaps." Jayk pointed out.

"I couldn't tell what the species was but whoever it was felt strange. Utterly devoid of emotion. I've only sensed that sort of calm in a handful of Jedi masters." Brae said.

Jayk tapped on the wall, trying to locate a void behind it but he was unsuccessful so he decided to resort to a more drastic measure.

"Master Priam I apologise but it appears that I need to damage your office." he said as he drew his lightsaber. Immediately a pair of the guardians who had accompanied them to the office stepped forwards to place themselves between Jayk and Selene.

"Relax." she told them, "I think I know what he has planned. You may proceed Jedi Udra."

There was a 'snap-hiss' as Jayk activated his lightsaber and then he plunged the blade directly into the wall before dragging it sideways, cutting a groove a metre deeper from one end of the wall to the other before he shut off his weapon again. Then he took a glow rod from a pouch on his belt and shone the beam into the groove, searching for any sign of a space behind the wall large enough for a person.

"Nothing." he said, "The rock behind this wall is solid. Brae could the additional person you sensed have been further back?"

"I doubt it." Brae answered, "Whoever it was that I sensed, they were close, just a couple of metres. I could have sworn that they were in the same room as us but I couldn't see them."

"I don't believe in ghosts." Selene commented.

"Master Priam my daughter's senses are very strong. I have never known her to make a mistake about something like this." Jayk replied and Brae smiled at the compliment.

"There is a first time for everything Jedi Udra and regardless of whether your padawan has been wrong before it is obvious that she is now." Selene said.

"So where does this leave us?" Brae asked.

"Perhaps a study of the outpost's structural drawings could shed some light on the matter." Jayk suggested and Selene nodded.

"That's straight forwards enough, I'll have them provided to you." she responded.

Kat was taken to a moderately sized room that had a computer terminal in it. This had already been prepared for her and as soon as she took off her cloak and sat down she saw that the outpost's personnel records had been called up in readiness for her to go through.

"Thanks, I'll be fine here." she told the guardian as he hung her cloak on a hook just inside the doorway and the masked figure who had not said a word to her so far simply bowed slightly before turning and walking away.

Sitting down at the terminal Kat immediately began to sort the data, starting by arranging the files by date so that the most recent assignments came first. For the time being she filtered out entirely anyone who was currently assigned to the outpost and instead began to go through the list of Jedi who had returned to Coruscant after completing their tour of duty here, searching for anyone who may have a reason to want the Udras there.

Searching the island for any means by which an intruder could have arrived was a large task and there were too few guardians to undertake it on their own. Therefore, their numbers were bolstered by members of the service corps and split up into pairs they were each assigned a different section of the shoreline as well as ground further inland to search.

"There's nothing out here." a technician told the member of the administrative staff he had been paired with as he looked out over the ocean through a pair of macrobinoculars, "If some did come ashore from a submersible or something then it either isn't out there now or it's in someone else's sector."

"If we go back in now then Master Priam will want to know why." the administrator told the technician, "Look at it this way, at least out here we've not got any Jedi breathing down our necks all the time."

"Unless they are out here to check on us." the technician said when he spotted a figure in a hooded cloak walking towards them along the shore.

"hello!" the administrator called out, waving at the approaching figure, "What are you doing out here?" but there was no response.

"We better go and see what they want." the technician said and the pair of them started to walk towards the approaching figure.

The stranger kept their head bowed enough that neither of the support staff could see who was beneath the hood but that did not stop the technician from walking right up to them and smiling.

"Master Jedi, we were expecting-" he began before all of a sudden there was a 'snap-hiss' as the hooded figure drew their lightsaber and ignited it. Then before either of the startled support staff could react the hooded figure swung the weapon in a horizontal arc and cut the technician in half.

Terrified, the administrator turned on the spot and began to run before the two halves of the dead technician could hit the sand. For a few seconds the hooded figure watch the administrator run before all of a sudden they too broke into a sprint and charged after him, impaling him through the spine with their lightsaber.

“How old are these images?” Jayk asked when Selene took him to the outpost’s command centre and showed him a hologram that showed how the structure of the outpost was dug into the island.

“They date back to the original construction at the end of the last war. There has never been any need to alter them.” Selene told him.

“So what’s this master?” Brae added, pointing to a vertical shaft than ran down below the outpost but that seemed to just end.

“That is the access to the nexus itself.” Selene answered, “It runs almost six hundred metres straight down. Of course no-one has used it since the outpost was constructed. The closest we come is when we carry out our regular test of the turbolift. We send it all the way down and then bring it back up again. We don’t have a plan for the Sith facility though. I think it was thought wiser not to examine it more than was necessary for sealing it off.”

“You said that the nexus was a place that a Sith created creatures using their sorcery. Did the Sith use the same shaft?” Jayk said.

“No.” Selene replied, “Of course I don’t know the specifics but every part of this outpost had to be dug by the Jedi Order. The Sith must have had some alternate means of getting in and out of their earlier facility.”

“Entrances that someone else could potentially find.” Jayk pointed out.

“No that’s unthinkable. The nexus was sealed off to ensure that no-one could get in or out without going through this outpost.” Selene said before the guardian commander came rushing up to her.

“Master Priam.” he said, “There’s been another killing. One of our search parties has been killed. We found this at the scene.” and then he handed over a fragment of cloth that had a very familiar look to it.

“That looks like it comes from a jedi’s cloak.” Brae commented.

“It comes from Kat’s cloak.” Jayk added when Selene handed the scrap of fabric to him, “She stitched this pattern around the edges so she could identify hers at the firing range.” and he pointed to a line of stitches that ran along the hem of the fabric.

“But Kat wouldn’t-” Brae began.

“Of course she wouldn’t commit murder but someone trying to frame her might just have harmed her to get this.” Jayk interrupted and then both he and Brae turned and rushed from the command centre.

4.

Kat reviewed each personnel file in turn but none of them appeared to be anything other than she would expect from members of the Jedi Order. However, this changed when she opened a file that startled her though.

"Stang." she said to herself when all of a sudden the door to the room she was in slid open and both Jayk and Brae burst in with their lightsabers activated," Jayk. Brae. What's wrong?" she asked.

"Are you okay?" Jayk responded.

"Of course. Why? What's happening?"

"The killer has struck again. They left evidence to try and implicate you. Where is your cloak?" Jayk told her.

"My cloak? It's right over-" Kat said, looking towards the hook on the wall where she had hung the garment only to find it now missing, "I left it right there." she said.

"The killer must have taken it somehow. But how would they have got in here without you seeing them?"

Brae commented and Kat frowned.

"It's easy. She was disguised as the guardian who escorted me here." she said.

"She?" Jayk said, noticing Kat's choice of words and she nodded to him.

"It's too much of a coincidence Jayk. Take a look at this, I just found it among the personnel records." Kat said, turning back to the computer screen. Jayk and Brae promptly shut down their lightsabers and joined her, looking at the file she had found.

"Neela Vortress was stationed here? I've got a very bad feeling about this." Brae said when she saw the face and the name associated with the file Kat had been looking at.

"Obviously it was a long time ago, just after she passed the trials from the looks of it but it was definitely her. It says she spent four years out here." Kat said.

"Then she must have returned here after Tylo escaped. Or perhaps Tylo escaped because she abandoned him. In either case we now have a good idea who our enemy is." Jayk said.

"Yeah and she's one of the most dangerous people in the galaxy." Brae added.

"And who might that be Padawan Udra?" Selene said from the doorway and looking around Jayk and Brae saw the Jedi master standing there with the guardian commander as well as two other guardians.

"All those guardians look like men. None of them is Neela." Brae said softly.

"Master Priam," Jayk began, "Jedi Maran believes that she has identified the killer."

"It's a woman called Neela Vortress. Until about two years ago she was a Jedi knight. Now she has a massive grudge against Jayk and Brae and she's been trying to make it look as if they've fallen to the Dark Side when in fact she has." Kat explained, "She was posted here for a time about twenty years ago or so."

"And can this Neela Vortress make herself invisible?" Selene said.

"No, it's still a mystery as to how she managed that but it looks like she has been disguising herself as one of the guardians you have here so she can move about without attracting attention." Jayk replied.

"Then perhaps we should remove her ability to remain anonymous." the guardian commander said and he reached up to his face, removing the mask he wore before hooking it on his belt, "You as well." he told the guardians standing behind him and they copied his action, revealing their faces and confirming Brae's assessment that they were all male.

"Commander put the word out that we have an intruder and have all your guardians remove their masks. I don't want this Neela Vortress to have anywhere to hide." Selene ordered and the commander nodded as he took out his comlink to give the order. Then she looked back at Jayk, "Now why did this woman pick my outpost for her scheme, whatever it may be?"

"The nexus. It has to be." Brae said and Jayk nodded in agreement.

"It's a trap. I suspect she wants to lure us down to the nexus. Possibly because she believes that once exposed to its power we will expose ourselves as being the agents of the Dark Side she claims we are." he said.

"So what are you going to do about it Jayk?" Kat asked and Jayk smiled at her.

"Spring the trap." he said.

"We'll need the command centre to open the blast door. There are no local controls." Selene said as she and the guardians walked with the Udras and Kat towards the heavily armoured door that blocked access to the turbolift that ran all the way down to the ancient Sith facility below the Jedi outpost.

"So how did Neela get it open?" Kat asked.

"I suspect the answer is rather obvious," Jayk said, "and if I'm right the command centre will not be able to open the blast door at all."

Turning a corner the blast door then came into view, a massive metal barrier that was as wide and tall as the passageway itself. As Selene had said there were no controls present to operate the door but there was an intercom panel that she approached and activated.

"This is Master Selene Priam. I'm at the door now. I am authorising you to open it." she said into the panel.

"Understood Master Priam." a voice responded and all of the jedi standing in front of the door looked at it and waited. However, nothing appeared to happen.

"Control what's wrong? I asked you to open the blast door." Selene said into the intercom.

"Yes master, it's just that the system isn't responding." the voice from the command centre told her.

"What do you mean it's not responding?" Selene said.

"Neela disconnected the motor." Jayk said, "She had to if she wanted to open the door." and then he reached out his hand and let the Force flow through him, concentrating on the blast door. It took just a few moments for the massive door to start to move, slowly rising upwards as Jayk applied all the telekinetic energy to it he could muster. The other jedi present all raised their hands as well and between them they applied enough energy to lift the door all the way to the ceiling and hold it there.

"Brae and I will go alone from here." Jayk said.

"Wait, you're going down there alone? Jayk that's a nexus, a source of pure Dark Side power." Kay said.

"And that is why we must go alone. The more people who go the greater the risk that something will go wrong. Neela wants myself and Brae and that is how we will spring her trap and draw her out into the open." Jayk told her before looking at Brae and adding, "Are you ready Brae?"

"Yes master." she replied, nodding. Then then pair of them walked under the door into the passageway on the other side that led right up to the turbolift shaft.

"Jayk wait." Kat called out after them and when they both looked around she smiled and added, "May the Force be with you."

Jayk and Brae walked calmly up to the turbolift and discovered that the car itself was not present.

"I've got bad feeling about this." Brae said, "If the car isn't here then it must be down at the bottom of the shaft and that means that someone took it down there with them."

Jayk smiled at this.

"Very perceptive my young apprentice." he said, pushing the button to summon the turbolift car. Then as they waited for it to arrive he reached out and took Brae's hand, "Brae what we are about to do is the most dangerous thing I have ever asked you to."

"I get it dad." she replied.

"No Brae, a nexus of Dark Side energy is as close to a physical manifestation of evil as you will ever encounter. We will be constantly surrounded by the Dark Side and it will try to take control of us. You must be more alert than ever for its efforts to seduce you. Even the slightest moment of weakness could damn us both forever." Jayk warned her just before the door to the turbolift slid open to reveal the empty car. Stepping inside the Udras saw that the control panel had only buttons to override the automatic opening and closing of the door and one more to set the car in motion. As soon as Jayk pressed this button the doors slid shut again and the car began to move.

"What if Neela's trap involved sabotaging the car?" Brae asked, suddenly concerned that the turbolift car could explode part way down the shaft.

"Remember Brae, Neela refuses to recognise her own fall to the Dark Side of the Force. She doesn't just want to kill use she wants to disgrace us to the Jedi Order, believing that in doing so she will win redemption for herself. I suspect that she will have deployed recording devices to try and capture any use of the Dark Side by us and for that she will need to provoke us. That is what you must watch for Brae." Jayk told her. All of a sudden Brae felt a chill run down her spine. At first she suspected that this was due to the growing presence of the Dark Side that she could sense but then she realised that it was a physical sensation.

"Is it getting colder in here?" she said and Jayk nodded.

"We must be below sea level by now." he responded.

"So that means we're getting closer to the old Sith base then." Brae added.

"Correct. The influence of the Dark Side will be strong. I think we should-" Jayk began.

She will betray you.

Jayk stopped talking as soon as he heard the warning through the Force. This was not the first time the Force had reached out to him with such a warning but so far he had dismissed it. However, on this occasion he was genuinely concerned that Brae could fall victim to the influence of the Dark Side.

"What's wrong?" Brae said when she noticed the hesitation.

"We are getting very close. I can sense the Dark Side calling to me." Jayk answered before the turbolift car came to a halt and the door opened.

Jayk saw himself in a room filled with machinery, his lightsaber in his hand as he fought for his life. In front of him stood his opponent, dressed in a shiny black bodyglove and armed with a lightsaber that had a blood

red blade. More disturbing about the other combatant though was their identity. Although the combat was moving quickly he immediately recognised the woman he was fighting as Brae.

5.

"There aren't any lights." Brae said, snapping Jayk out of his vision.

"They probably haven't worked in centuries." he said and Brae reached for her lightsaber, intending to use it as a source of illumination.

"No Brae." Jayk cautioned her, "I think down here we should avoid the use of our weapons as much as possible." and he instead took a flare from a pouch that he ignited before tossing it into the darkness. The flare struck a wall and bounced back a short distance before landing on the floor and illuminating a short passageway that connected to another running at an angle. The style of construction of these two passageways was very different and it was clear that the short passage had been dug by the Republic engineers who had built the outpost above, connecting it to an existing passageway in the Sith facility. Cautiously the two Jedi stepped out of the turbolift and walked to the junction between the two different passageways, looking in both directions as far as the light from the flare would allow them.

"Well if Neela's lying in wait for us then she's not here." Brae commented.

"No, but she has been. Look." Jayk replied and he pointed to a tiny red light visible beyond the reach of the flare's light. Jayk then took a glow rod from his belt and turned it on, shining it towards the light as he walked closer. This revealed the light to be mounted on a small camera that was fitted with a motion sensor, "Obviously intended to record our movements. There will be more." Jayk said as he looked around.

"Shouldn't we destroy it? Or at least shut it off?" Brae asked as she joined her father.

"Why? Even if it is transmitting back to Neela then she already knows where we are. On the other hand the footage they capture will be as useful in demonstrating that our actions were all within what is allowed by the Jedi Code as in proving Neela's case."

"Okay then, so now what?" Brae added.

"Now I shall follow your lead Brae. Tell me where the Dark Side is strongest. That is where the nexus is and that is where Neela will be waiting for us."

Brae hesitated, reluctant to call upon the Force while all she could sense was the Dark Side all around her.

"What if I fall?" she said and Jayk smiled.

"Brae you are not the confused young woman I first encountered stuffed into a locker by her classmates. You can use the Force without giving into anger, fear or hatred. Trust your feelings." he said.

"Okay here goes." Brae said and she took a deep breath as she closed her eyes and reached out into the Force.

Submit Brae. You will never be a Jedi knight.

Almost instantly she gasped and opened her eyes wide as she felt the Dark Side rushing towards her, trying to drown her in its power.

"I felt it." she exclaimed, "The Dark Side called to me. How are my eyes?"

"Still very much blue." Jayk reassured her, "So can you tell which way the nexus is?"

"Easy. That way." Brae replied and Jayk nodded before they both began to walk in the direction she had indicated.

Even centuries after the end of the last war against the Sith, the facility still bore the scars that no-one had bothered to do anything about before it was abandoned and there were still blast marks on walls as well as debris in passageways. One section of the facility had collapsed entirely, the beam from Jayk's glow rod illuminating a pile of rubble that completely blocked a side passage. Luckily for him and Brae this was not the direction they needed to head in and Brae pointed down a clear stretch of passageway instead.

Brae led them to a hall that had once ended in a large doorway. Now though this barrier was gone, its component parts lying buckled and holed on the floor where they had landed when Republic forces stormed the facility and blasted their way to its very heart.

"This is it dad." Brae said softly, "The nexus is right here."

"Then we must tread carefully. The Dark Side will stop at nothing to trick us." Jayk said before stepping through the doorway into the room beyond.

You are a fool Jayk Udra. Your family will serve the Sith. Neela knows this. The council knows this. That is why they did not even trust you with knowing you had a daughter. You can either embrace Dark Side or die. Your time is short.

Jayk ignored the voice in his head as he looked around the room. It was a large chamber that still contained the remnants of the scientific instruments an ancient Sith sorcerer had used to alter living beings into weapons, including holding pens for their creations.

This was true power. The power to shape life. Embrace the Dark Side and all of it could be yours.

"I wonder if any of the things made in this lab survived the assault only to be sealed in here?" Brae commented as she and Jayk both sensed the Dark Side calling to them.

"I don't think we need worry about that right now Brae." Jayk replied as from out of the darkness at the far end of the room a figure emerged wearing the armour of a jedi temple guardian, "Hello Neela." he said to her and she laughed.

"I should have known that the Dark Side would have given you enough insight to identify me." Neela responded as she removed her mask to reveal her features.

"Dad she's not alone." Brae whispered and Jayk nodded.

"Actually Kat found your name in the outpost's old personnel records while you were trying to frame her for murder." he called out "I assume that you used your knowledge of this place to find a way through the seals?"

"Yes, I used a submersible to get here and searched for the original entrances created by the Sith. It took some doing but I was able to cut my way inside. I never set out to frame you though Jayk, I was trying to provoke a response." Neela replied, "Killing the outpost staff was meant to make them pay closer attention to you. Close enough that they couldn't fail to spot your evil."

Strike her down.

"And I suppose cold blooded murder isn't evil isn't it?" Brae asked.

"Any jedi would lay down their life to resist the Dark Side." Neela said.

"Look at what you have become Neela. Twisted and evil, justifying the taking of innocent life and for what?" Jayk said.

"The truth. The Jedi Order needs to know what you two are. You may call me evil if you want but from my point of view the pair of you are evil and I have enough experience in hunting down the servants of the Dark Side to know them when I see them." Neela said.

She deserves to die. Kill her.

"Then come back with us to Coruscant Neela. Bring your evidence to the jedi council." Jayk said.

"Not while I can still resist." Neela said and then there was a 'snap-hiss' as she activated her lightsaber, the blade lighting up the darkened room around her.

"Now?" Brae said, her hand moving towards her own lightsaber and Jayk nodded as he cast his glow rod aside.

"Now, but be careful." he told her and both of them drew their weapons and ignited their blades.

The three Force users faced one another without moving. Neela desperately wanted the Udras to make the first move against her but they were trying to avoid any act of aggression that could make them more vulnerable to the influence of the Dark Side that continued to goad them.

Kill her. Do it!

"I still don't see the other one." Jayk commented.

"They're there. I know it. Right behind there with her. I can't explain it." Brae replied.

"Will we stand here facing one another until the end of the universe Jayk? Come on, you know you want to end this. Kill me and you can continue to keep your crimes a secret." Neela said.

"Kill us and you can tell the jedi council what a good job you've done. Tylo may have escaped but-" Brae began and the reaction the mention of Tylo provoked startled her.

Anger.

"Don't you mention his name!" Neela snapped, "When I have finished with you Tylo and I will be together. He loves me."

"Neela you know that the jedi code forbids attachment." Jayk pointed out.

"So says the man standing beside his daughter. Tylo will work for me just as he has worked for you. He will not abandon me again." Neela said.

"Abandon you? Is that what you call it when he escaped from your captivity?" Jayk said.

"He was tricked. He didn't understand how important he is but I'll make him see the truth." Neela replied.

"Well I think you'll have a job there Neela." Brae said with a smile, "From the video I saw he's quite happy with his new girlfriend. What's her name dad? Zara something?"

Rage.

"No!" Neela screamed and all of a sudden she leapt into the air and across the ancient laboratory in a single bound to land in front of Brae.

The teenage jedi reacted only just in time to parry the swing of Neela's lightsaber but Jayk reacted quickly and launched a counter attack from the side.

Danger.

Neela's anger let the Dark Side flow through her easily and in turn she reacted abnormally quickly to Jayk's attack, turning to block it while waving her hand at Brae to unleash a blast of telekinesis that hurled her backwards. She followed this up with a rapid succession of attacks aimed at Jayk and he fell back as he struggled to keep up with her, parrying each blow from her lightsaber but unable to find a gap in which to strike back at her.

Your father will die unless you do something Brae. Use the power offered to you and you can save his life.

Brae frowned as she got back to her feet and looked around for her lightsaber. Unfortunately the weapon had shut off when she dropped it while tumbling through the air and having dropped her glow rod when she drew her weapon she had no source of light other than what was being cast by the furious if rather one sided duel between her father and Neela.

When she caught sight of her lightsaber she was about to use the Force to summon it back to her hand but then reconsidered it. She had no idea whether using the Force like that could give the Dark Side a way in and instead she darted across the room to where the lightsaber was, activating it again as soon as she scooped it up. Then she turned around to see how her father was doing and the last piece of a mystery finally fell into place.

She could still sense the additional presence she had felt earlier without being able to see it and now it was coming from where Neela was fighting with her father. Assuming that one of the guardians standing behind Selene when the Udras first met her had been Neela in disguise that meant that this extra presence in the Force went wherever she did and she remembered Tylo telling her what had happened when Neela had used the Force to prevent her from recognising her.

They had slept together.

"Dad she's pregnant!" Brae shouted.

"No! I won't let you hurt my baby." Neela hissed and she was suddenly able to hook her blade under Jayk' and force it upwards. Then before he could disengage and fall back further she took one hand off her lightsaber and used it to focus another blast of telekinetic energy that blasted Jayk off his feet. Rather than follow this up with a killing strike from her lightsaber though she instead turned on Brae and charged at her. Brae was prepared for this though and at the last moment she dived out of the way, causing Neela to stumble. Rather than attack with her lightsaber Brae then delivered a kick to the back of Neela's leg, striking it at the knee and she screamed in pain as she collapsed, her weapon slipping from her grasp. Before the lightsaber could even hit the floor Brae used the Force to pull it to her and reactivated it, standing over Neela with a glowing blade in each hand.

Finish her!

Brae raised both weapons above her head and was about to bring them both down on Neela when she unexpectedly found herself lifted up off the floor and held out of reach of Neela. Her first thought was that this was Neela's work but then she realised that it was not the woman on the floor channelling the Force, it was Jayk.

"Brae no. There has been enough killing." he said as he set her down while he walked towards Neela with his lightsaber inactive and when he reached her he held out his hand to help her back to her feet, "It's over Neela." he said.

"What are you doing Jayk?" Neela asked as she stood up.

"Yeah dad, what are you doing?" Brae added.

"Saving Neela and her child. Tylo's child I'm guessing." Jayk replied, "Neela you know what the Dark Side does. It consumes people. It has consumed you ever since Mey died."

Mey had been Neela's padawan who died falling into a river of toxic pollutants when Neela had first tried to demonstrate to the council that the Udras had fallen to the Dark Side in accordance with an ancient prophecy.

"Ever since you killed her." Neela replied, glaring at Jayk.

"No Neela, you killed Mey. It was an accident but you fired the shot that sent her off that bridge." Jayk said, sharing his memories of the incident with Neela and she saw herself firing a blaster at Brae. She leapt out of the way and the energy bolt instead hit Neela's padawan Mey in her leg. The weapon was only set to 'stun' but it was enough to cause the unfortunate Mey to lose her footing and fall from the bridge, plummeting into the flowing river of poison below.

"No!" Neela cried out again just as she had when she watched Mey fall to her inevitable death and she staggered backwards away from Jayk.

"Mey was only the first Neela. How many more lives have you taken since then in your misguided quest for vengeance?" he said, following her, "Will you let it take the life of your child as well? The Dark Side corrupts everything it touches. What will that do to your child Neela? You know how helpless it is."

"I won't let you harm my baby." Neela said, placing her hands over her abdomen where she could sense the child growing inside her.

"I'm not going to hurt your baby. I'm going to save it. One last sacrifice if that's what it takes." Jayk said and he held out his lightsaber for Neela to take, "If you are so certain that I have fallen then take my weapon and use it. But I promise you that Brae is innocent. Return to Coruscant with her and Kat and let the Jedi Order take care of you and your baby."

Neela reached out and put her hand on Jayk's lightsaber but as she did so she saw in her mind the faces of everyone she had killed in her pursuit of the Udras, comparing her actions with those she had hunted before leaving the Jedi Order. She had always targeted beings who abused their power and now she saw that that was exactly what she had been doing all along. Then once again she saw herself shooting Mey and the

young woman who she had cared for for so long falling to her death. All because of Neela's own mistake. "No." she said softly and then she collapsed to the floor and began to weep, "Mey what have I done?" "I think we're done here."

"You have a report for me healer?" Grand Master Ress asked as he and Yoda approached the Jedi healer who had been assigned to monitor and treat Neela.

"Of course grand master. If you'd like to come with me." the woman responded and she led the two council members to a nearby doorway that had a small window set into it at eye level for a typical humanoid. Sat on a repulsor chair, Yoda was able to adjust his altitude so that he could see through into the room beyond while the grand master had to stoop slightly. Through the window they saw the largely featureless room on the other side of the door. Every surface was cushioned meaning that even if someone slammed into one of the walls they could not hurt themselves. Neela sat huddled in one corner of the room wearing a simple gown and rocking back and forth.

"What is your diagnosis?" Grand Master Ress asked.

"She's suffered a total mental breakdown. She is overcome with guilt about the deaths she has caused and she can't cope with it. She is terrified that any action she takes will cause more harm." the healer answered.

"And the child?" the grand master added and the healer nodded.

"We've confirmed her pregnancy grand master. She's about five weeks along." the healer said.

"And what of the father?" Yoda said.

"We've run a test and compared it to the temple records. We found a match." the healer replied.

"Then Tylo Kurrast the father is." Yoda said and the healer nodded.

"Obviously we can't tell whether the child will inherit Neela's midi-chlorian count or not. That will have to wait until after the birth when the two are no longer connected. Do you have any specific instructions about what to do then?"

"Do as always you do." Yoda said, "If Force sensitive the child is then raised by the Jedi Order it shall be, but if not then given to Captain Kurrast it shall be."