

STAR WARS

DARKNESS RISING

2-09: TERMS & CONDITIONS

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A mission to investigate safe deposit boxes Thal N'Krey held at a bank turns deadly when what he had kept in them turns out not to be as lifeless as was first supposed...

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1.

"What about climate control?" Thal N'Krey asked the bank clerk in the process of opening the vault. "Total." the clerk replied and when the heavy blast door slowly swung open Thal felt a cool breeze on his face from inside the vault, "The system is adapted from a starship life support system. It is fed from compressed vessels to ensure the perfect atmospheric mix and scrubbed internally before being fed back into the air inside the vault. All of this means that the vault is totally isolated from the outside world in an atmospheric sense. There are no holes in the security where vents must pass from the vault to anywhere outside that an intruder could use to gain access to it. Certain sections of the vault can also be isolated from the rest for a limited period, giving customers willing to pay a premium the option of specifying environmental conditions unique to their own requirements."

"That won't be necessary." Thal said as the pair entered the vault and were immediately confronted by two large security droids. These scanned the the identity badge that the bank clerk wore and then stepped back to allow them to proceed on their way.

The private storage vault was laid out in a single long passageway that had chambers along both sides. Some of these were accessible through ordinary humanoid style doorway whereas others had entrances large enough to permit the passage of the repulsorlift platforms often used by hutt's to move around without needing to rely on their own muscle power or even small vehicles.

"As you requested the boxes you have hired are located in different rooms. Though if this is because the contents are in some way reactive then I should warn you that-

"The items I wish to store are not dangerous." Thal interrupted, "However, I may wish to show some of them to interested beings and I do not want to have to reveal the exact location of all of my property to anyone."

"Of course." the clerk said, "In that case I'll show you the first of your storage units and we can discuss payment."

A notice that an account had become overdue appeared automatically on the clerk's computer screen. Ordinarily this would be a brief message identifying a single private storage box but on this occasion the account was linked to multiple boxes spread across several different rooms in the vault. The clerk immediately opened up the account records and saw that after an initial sum had been paid to gain the use of the boxes there had been regular annual payments to keep the account going. These had been made in person by the account holder rather than transferred electronically despite the contact details indicating that he was a resident of a different sector entirely. Each payment had been more than was needed to cover the next standard period and so the account had remained in credit even when the customer had abruptly ceased visiting. Now though the credit had been exhausted and the customer was out of time to make payment. The account records also held the details of automated attempts at communication with the customer as well as one in person transmission, none of which had been responded to. By the terms and conditions associated with the account the items stored in the vault could now be seized and auctioned off to cover the outstanding bill.

Transferring details of the storage units associated with the account the clerk descended into the vault. The droids standing guard allowed the clerk access as she held out her badge to them and then she made her way to the closest of the storage units. Now that the account had been marked as overdue the locking mechanism had switched from one that only permitted the customer, a kiffar by the name of Thal N'Krey according to the records, to access them to only allowing bank staff to open up the units. There were no notes present about special handling or storage requirements for any of the unit contents so the clerk simply held up her identity badge to the scanner and then stood back as the storage unit slid out of the wall. Once fully exposed the clerk was able to detach the storage unit itself and set it down on the table in the centre of the room. Opening the box she peered inside to see what was being stored and the moment she did so the two droids by the entrance turned around and came rushing to investigate the cause of the sudden loud scream.

"Tylo, I guess this is the first time you've walked into a bank vault without planning on robbing it." Jedi Padawan Brae Udra said to the former smuggler accompanying her and the man who was not only her instructor but also her uncle Jayk Udra.

"Keep it up kid." Tylo responded as they walked up the steps to the front door of the bank, "We'll see how good their security is when I lock you in one of these boxes we've come to look at."

"I would be grateful if the pair of you would stop your bickering." Jayk commented before he entered the bank ahead of the others.

"She started it." Tylo muttered and then he came to a sudden halt when he passed through the open

doorway and saw the interior of the bank.

All of the usual features he expected to see inside a bank such as barriers around the serving positions, quick service ATM droids, rapid deployment blast doors and security cameras were present but he had not expected there to be more than a dozen uniformed police officers plus plain clothes detectives and at least half a dozen medical staff present.

"Master, what's going on?" Brae asked.

"I don't know Brae." Jayk replied, "All I was told was that property relating to Thal N'Krey had been discovered here in a bank vault on Garrandon. There was no mention of anything else."

"I hate to say it but could Tylo's former friends have got here first?" Brae suggested but before Jayk could reply a smartly dressed man walked up to them and they saw the metallic badge in the shape of a shield hung around his neck on a chain.

"Jedi Udra?" he asked, "I'm Inspector Callas. We've been expecting you."

"Inspector." Jayk responded, "This is my padawan learner Brae and pilot Tylo Kurrast. Can you tell us what is going on here? We were just told that the bank had discovered a connection between one of their accounts and a being we are trying to locate. A kiffar called Thal N'Krey"

"Yeah, that's the guy we're investigating." the inspector told him, "It looks like our Mister N'Krey rented a bunch of storage units here some time ago. He kept up payments for a while and even got himself ahead. But then he stopped paying and so the bank decided to seize the assets he held with them and sell them off."

Tylo snorted when he heard this.

"Figures." he said.

"Well the clerk who went down into the vault to see what the bank was taking possession of got the shock of her life when she opened up a box and found a severed hand inside." the inspector continued and the Jedi and Tylo exchanged glances.

"It wasn't still moving was it?" Tylo asked.

"No of course not. I already told you it was dead."

"Well from what I've seen over the last few months that doesn't count for much." Tylo said.

"You said that Thal N'Krey rented more than one storage unit." Jayk said, "Have any of the others been opened?"

"Yes and some of them were just full of artist's materials and artwork. But we found body parts in four others. Of course we ran a search on the guy and his name got flagged up as being wanted by the Jedi Order so the commissioner sent for you. We're still going through what's left. According to the bank records this Mister N'Krey had more than thirty boxes registered to him."

"I'd like to see them for myself." Jayk said.

"Sure, come this way." Inspector Callas replied.

Along with the inspector, a bank employee led the group down into the vault where the security droids had been temporarily deactivated so that they would not hold up the police or medical staff now dealing with what had been found. Inspector Callas then led them to the room that was currently being investigated and they arrived just in time to see another box being removed from its usual storage slot. The removal was carried out by a bomb disposal droid that would inspect it carefully for any signs of hazardous contents while a small group of bank staff, police and a medic stood back until given the all clear.

"Zero pathogens and zero explosive compounds detected." the droid announced after inserting a narrow probe through a hole into the box.

"Then let's take a look." one of the police officers present said but Jayk placed a hand on his shoulder to stop him moving forwards.

"If it's alright with you I'd like to see what's in that box first." the Jedi said and then he walked up to the box, along with Brae, Tylo and the inspector. Slowly he opened the box to reveal a number of packages wrapped in cloth. Most of these were regular shapes but one of them was less so. Also larger than the others Jayk started by lifting this out of the box and laying it down on the table.

"That's an awfully familiar shape." Tylo said, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

"Master wait!" Brae snapped just as Jayk was reaching for the knot in the cord that kept the package closed.

"What's wrong Brae?" he asked.

"Whatever's in there." Brae replied, staring at the package, "I can sense the Dark Side gathering around it." Jayk frowned and focused his mind on the package. Sure enough there was a slight trace of the Dark Side centred on it and he inspected the wrapping more closely. It was at this point that Jayk noticed the way that the cord used to seal the package reflected the light inside the vault..

"Interesting." he said.

"Look, if there's something I need to know-" Inspector Callas began.

"This package is designed to isolate the contents from the Force." Jayk said before he could finish, "There are tiny crystals woven into the fabric of this cord." then he began to undo the knot in the cord. The moment Jayk did this both he and Brae shuddered as they sensed the coldness often associated with the Dark Side.

Jayk quickly opened up the package, pushing the fabric back to expose the contents and Tylo snarled when he saw what was inside.

"Yeah, I figured as much." he said as he looked at the humanoid foot.

The general appearance of the severed foot was of one that had once belonged to either a baseline human or one of the closely related species that could be found scattered on hundreds of worlds across the galaxy. From the relatively large size of it, the foot appeared to have come from a male but there were near human species larger than average for which a female member could easily have grown to this size. The wound where it had been cut from whatever body it had come from was neat, having the appearance of being caused by a single swipe of a blade sharp enough to have cut through not only the soft tissue of the leg but also the shin bone about half way down its length. The greatest problem in identifying the origin of the foot was likely to be its general condition, however. Though the flesh had not decayed and there was no smell to suggest that such a process was underway the foot was blackened from the surface of the skin right down the visible core of the bone where it had been cut through. This suggested that the foot had been treated with some sort of chemical to preserve it and it was typical for such chemicals to destroy key genetic traces that could be used in the identification process.

"What happened to the other pieces?" Jayk asked, looking at the nearby inspector.

"They've been taken to the morgue for examination." he replied, "We're working on the theory that they are all part of the same corpse, so far we haven't found any duplicate parts. Unfortunately the fingerprints have been burned off but the examiner was confident that there'd be enough information left for us to pull a DNA fragment to go off."

"Master what if this is Thal N'Krey?" Brae said.

"An interesting idea my young apprentice." Jayk responded and he looked at one of the bank staff, "Does the bank have records of when Thal N'Krey's boxes were accessed?" he asked, "And security footage to match?"

"We have a full record of times Mister N'Krey visited the vault." the bank employee answered, "But our security footage is limited to the last two years. After that it is disposed of."

"That's after he vanished." Tylo commented, "If someone did chop Thal up and stuff bits of him inside his own storage boxes then they'll have done it at some time before the footage was wiped."

"There is also the matter of the other items in the boxes." Jayk said and he looked back at Inspector Callas, "Inspector I want everything that isn't a body part delivered to our ship. It's the *Swift Exit* and is located in a private docking bay on Seventh West Street."

"I know the place." the inspector replied.

"Good and in the mean time continue to have the pieces of the body or bodies sent to your morgue. If it can be identified then that may be useful information." Jayk said before turning to Brae and Tylo, "Come on," he told them, "we'll take what has already been found back to the ship and see if there's anything significant among it."

2.

The items already removed from Thal's storage boxes other than the mysterious body parts filled several containers that were delivered to the *Swift Exit*. Many of these were of minimal interest such as artist's supplies but there were completed works of art based on Sith culture that needed to be inspected to make sure that they were not genuine Sith artefacts and did not contain any information about them. Of greater interest though were the notebooks and memory sticks Thal had stored.

Jayk began by sorting the contents of the containers into piles of the items' relative worth and as he worked at this Tylo walked over to him with a bottle of beer in one hand and reached down to pick up one of the larger notebooks in the other.

"Any naughty pictures in this one?" he said as he made his way to a seat and sat down in it before opening up the book and starting to read, "Oh look, there are."

"This is serious work Tylo." Brae said, "We need to focus."

"Oh I'm focusing alright. Look, here's a sketch of that Vallani Mellet your uncle liked. Hey Jayk, did she really have a birthmark right there or is that an ink smudge?" Tylo said, turning the book so that Jayk could see the image.

"The most efficient way of searching these mem-sticks is to have Cal review them." Jayk said, ignoring Tylo's comment and he stood up with three mem-sticks in his hand. At the same time there was a glow from the crystalline cube located on a shelf at the side of the lounge and the hologram of a man in jedi robes appeared.

"You called?" Cal said.

"Yes, what's the quickest way for you to search through the contents of these mem-sticks?" Jayk asked.

"Just plug them into the ports over there and I'll hook into the system remotely." Cal replied, "Is there anything specific you want me to look out for?"

"Thal N'Krey's current address?" Tylo suggested before taking another sip from his drink.

"Any clues as to Thal's location or business dealings would be useful." Jayk said and Cal nodded.

"Okay, that's pretty broad but I'll see what I can do. What will you be doing in the meantime?" he said.

"I'll join Tylo in looking through the notebooks for any relevant information while Brae checks these artworks for any signs of genuine Sith manufacture or knowledge." Jayk replied and he was just turning away from Cal's hologram when he had another thought, "Oh and one other thing Cal. See if there is any mention of anything to do with body parts. Either obtaining them or cutting a body up into its parts for any reason."

"That's pretty specific. What's Thal been up to?" Cal asked.

"Some of the storage boxes contained body parts." Brae told him, "Human or humanoid."

"Ah. Now that sound's worrying." Cal said.

"I agree." Jayk replied as he plugged the three mem-sticks into sockets on the wall.

"I sensed the Dark Side from them." Brae said, "Cal, do you know anything about Sith rituals involving body parts?"

"I fought against the Sith and their servants, I didn't undertake a close study of their sorcery like my wife was forced to." Cal replied, "But I do know that the sacrifice of sentient beings featured in a lot of their rituals. Especially if their deaths could be made drawn out and painful. It helped concentrate the Dark Side around them more."

"Well see what you can find." Jayk said, returning to the stacks of items taken from Thal's storage units, "The medical examiner's office may be able to find out more about these body parts even if we can't."

"There's another one here for you doc." a uniformed policeman said as he entered the city morgue with a sealed box in his arms.

"Ah." the medical examiner replied as he straightened up from the corpse he had been working on, "Is this more for the do it yourself corpse I've been sent pieces of? What is it this time?"

"A good one doc. We've found the head. Or at least a head. We're still taking bets on how many different bodies we might be dealing with here. Care to give me any hints?"

"Bring it over here." the examiner said, walking across the room to the rows of drawers set into one of the walls and he opened one of them, sliding out the long tray of body parts that was inside. Each of the parts had been arranged to be in the correct relative positions to the rest, "So far we still seem to be dealing with just one body." he said, pulling down the sheet that covered the various parts a short distance, "We've got both legs, one full arm and one partial plus the torso and neck. I take it that the head is complete?"

"I didn't ask doc." the policeman replied and he set the box down on a nearby workbench before releasing the seals.

The examiner then stepped forwards to peer into the box and he smiled as he took what appeared to be a

complete human head from inside. Like all of the other body parts that had been delivered so far there were no signs of decomposition anywhere on the head but its tissue had been badly discoloured from whatever process had been used to preserve it.

"Let me see." he said, setting the head down on the same workbench that the box sat on and carefully he pulled open the eyelids to see what lay beneath them, "The eyes are still present." he said, smiling and then he reached for a recording rod. He used this to take pictures of the head from various angles, "With any luck I'll be able to use this to create a virtual image of the head that we can run through our computer and try to get a positive identification." then he picked the head up again before turning towards the open drawer, "In the meantime lets keep the original with all of the rest of his parts shall we?" and he put the head down on the tray inside the drawer, positioning it above the torso so that the two exposed sections of the neck were almost touching. Then he lifted the sheet over the head and slid the tray back into the wall before closing the drawer door.

"Thanks you officer." the examiner told the police officer, "Tell your superiors that I will be in touch if I find anything."

"Haven't you been told doc? The Jedi are taking over the investigation." the policeman responded.

"The Jedi? What for?"

"Apparently they're after the guy who rented all of the storage units these body parts were found in. Looks like he was into some major poodoo if the Jedi Order is getting involved. I'm telling you doc, I've got a bad feeling about this stuff and I'm glad I'm not the one that has to have all those body parts just a few metres away from me."

"Parts being the operative word officer." the examiner replied with a smile, "Somehow I doubt that fragments of a corpse are going to do me any harm."

As the policeman was leaving the morgue, inside the drawer containing the body parts recovered from the bank vault there was a sudden spark of green energy between the head and torso of the corpse. There followed more sparks and along the path of one of them a strand of flesh suddenly leapt out to connect the two pieces of the body, pulling them closer together.

"Hey this is interesting." Tylo said, leaning forwards in his chair.

"What, found a picture of a woman with her clothes on?" Brae responded.

"I've found Thal's ship. Or at least more on it." Tylo said and Jayk turned around.

"A registry?" he asked.

"No, but look at this." Tylo said and he turned the notebook he was looking through around so that the Jedi could see it. The book was open to a page where Thal had made a basic sketch of a humanoid figure crouched down with their hands gripping a large sword.

"Looks like a plan for a painting." Brae commented.

"Yeah, but a very special painting." Tylo replied, "Look here." and he pointed to the page beside the basic sketch where a geometric shape had been drawn.

"What is it?" Jayk said.

"A starship hull section." Tylo said, "Thal was an artist and I'd say that he wanted to put some of that art on his ship."

"You mean like that picture of the woman with the blaster on the outside of the *Swift Exit*?" Brae said and Tylo smiled.

"Exactly. I paid some students to paint that on the hull and they made a plan just like this so that they'd know how much room they had. The Bureau of Ships and Services may not have any record of Thal owning a ship but I bet that his hull art would have attracted attention. All we need to do is ask the right questions to see if anyone's seen it." Tylo said.

This could actually be useful." Jayk said, "If that outline was intended to express the size and shape of the area available for custom hull art then perhaps we could use it to determine what class of ship we are looking for."

"That too." Tylo said, smiling at Brae.

"Well I've found something interesting too." Cal said as he reappeared, "Thal was building himself an interesting database of potential clients. One of these mem-sticks holds copies of media reports about major art sales across the galaxy."

"I didn't think he was very successful." Brae said.

"Maybe not, but he would have had to have contacted these people if he was trying to persuade them to buy his work whether he made a sale or not." Jayk pointed out.

"So what about the other two mem-sticks?" Tylo said.

"Ah now that's more interesting." Cal answered, "It looks like Thal was using mem-sticks to carry astrogation data. Each one could only carry the numbers for a single short ranged jump but there's enough in here to identify a couple of the places he went. Or at least was planning to go. Both were systems I remember from actions against the Sith."

"Thal was looking for anything left behind by the Sith." Jayk said, "This notebook is filled with what could be short descriptions of artefacts and suggestions of how to use them in his art."

"Your turn." Tylo then said, looking at Brae and she frowned.

"What do you mean my turn?" she replied.

"I mean that I've found out about the art on the hull of Thal's ship. Your uncle found his notes on turning Sith artefacts into art to sell and the ghost of Jedi past over there has his business diary. So what have you found?" Tylo said.

"Is there anything significant among those artworks Brae?" Jayk asked.

"Not as far as I can tell." Brae responded, "It's all just bits and pieces made of clay. I can't sense the Dark Side in any of it so if the Sith did create any of it then they didn't intend to use it in any of their evil schemes for total galactic domination." then she frowned and picked up a spherical piece of metal that was patterned with a number of grooves etched into its surface, "I don't even know what this is supposed to be. Was it a decoration or was some Sith lord's favourite pet supposed to fetch it? I-" and then Brae gasped.

"What's wrong?" Tylo said when he saw this.

"The Dark Side. It runs through that object." Jayk told him, sensing the same disturbance from the patterned sphere as Brae and he got up to take it from Brae. As soon as she was no longer in contact with the sphere Brae let out a deep breath and slumped forwards, supporting herself with her hands.

"So how come she didn't sense it before?" Tylo asked.

"Because it just became active." Brae told him, "I think something just woke up and I've got a very bad feeling about what it intends to do next."

3.

"Back again so soon officer?" the medical examiner asked when he saw the same police officer who had recently delivered the severed head returning to the morgue. The examiner was stood at a drinks dispenser, trying to get the cup of caf he had just ordered from the machine but getting nothing but an odd whirring sound, "So what is it this time?"

"Part of an arm." the officer told him, "From about the shoulder down to just below the elbow. It was there waiting for me when I got to the bank."

"Well bring it this way." the examiner said, beckoning the police officer towards the morgue itself. Then after he had taken two steps from the dispenser he heard the sound of a cup dropping out of it and onto the floor, followed by the sound of a liquid being poured out and he sighed, "Can my day get any worse?" he muttered, shaking his head as he led the police officer back into the morgue itself.

Inside he walked over to the drawer that contained the body parts already recovered while the police officer set the container he carried down on the same workbench as earlier and opened it up while the examiner opened up the drawer.

"Now let's see-" the examiner began as he pulled back the sheet covering the body parts before he suddenly gasped and stepped backwards.

"What's up doc?" the police officer asked when he saw this in his peripheral vision and he turned towards the examiner and the drawer just in time to see the figure dragging itself out, "Holy kriff!" he exclaimed and he reached for his blaster, knocking the container with the arm inside to the floor and the partial limb rolled out on to the floor.

To the horror of both the examiner and the police officer the severed body part then began to flex back and forth at its elbow joint despite not being connected to anything while the one armed figure that had just climbed out of the drawer turned towards it and the police officer before taking a step towards him.

"Stay back!" the police officer shouted, taking aim with his blaster at the figure's chest but the previously dead and dismembered man took another step. This prompted the police officer to open fire and there was a flash of blue from his blaster before the stun blast struck the advancing figure. The shot had no effect though, nor did the next two that the police officer fired in rapid succession. Hurriedly the police officer reached for the selector switch on his weapon to adjust it to a lethal setting. The time it took to do this was enough for the advancing figure to get within arms reach, however and with a single swing of his hand the reassembled and reanimated corpse knocked the police officer's weapon from his hand and sent it flying across the morgue. Then the figure reached out with its one hand and grasped the police officer around his neck, gripping him tightly and lifting him up off the floor.

Even lifted half a metre off the floor and being choked the police officer put up a fight, first attempting to break the large man's grip on him with his hands the officer then reached for the stun baton on his belt and thrust it against his assailant's stomach but like the shots from his blaster this had no effect. Next he tried using the baton as an ordinary club and striking the man around his head but this too was ineffective and as his assailant tightened his grip the police officer dropped the baton to the floor.

Meanwhile the examiner regained his senses and looked around the morgue for anything he could use as a weapon. The first suitable looking device that caught his attention was a laser used for cutting through bone. Normally the beam was set to penetrate just a few millimetres into a corpse but with a flick of a switch this could be increased to be able to cut right through a limb instead. Grabbing hold of the saw the examiner charged at the reanimated man and pressed the saw's emitter against his back before activating it. The beam cut through the man's rib cage but did nothing to stop him continue choking the police officer. However, he did look around at the examiner who stepped away from the man, looking around for the best escape route now foremost in his thoughts. There was a sudden 'crunch' as the man crushed the police officer's neck and then he hurled the corpse at the examiner, knocking him to the floor. Then as he was crawling out from under the body of the police officer, the examiner looked up at the reanimated man to see him bending down to pick up the newly delivered arm from the floor. To the examiner's amazement he then pressed this against his shoulder and there was green lightning as the flesh magically knitted itself together. Then the man walked towards the exit from the morgue and left, prompting screams from bystanders as it walked past them.

"I think it's just one groove." Jayk commented as he inspected the sphere, using the nib of a pen to trace the path of the surface detailing, "There is no beginning and no end, it just loops back on itself."

"Clever. Must have taken some planning." Tylo said, "But what's it for?"

"If it was made by the Sith then nothing good." Brae commented.

"So not a Sith healing device then?" Tylo said.

"Even Sith healing devices were evil in their execution." Jayk replied, "With execution being a suitable word. The Sith stole the living Force of others to regenerate themselves."

"Quite true." Cal added, "My wife witnessed one in use first hand. She said it literally drained the life out of a healthy man as it healed someone else."

Then there was a chiming sound from the cockpit.

"Looks like someone's calling." Jayk said and he set the sphere down on the table and made his way into the cockpit. Tylo and Brae both followed him and they all sat down before activating the communication system, at which point the face of Inspector Callas appeared on a screen in front of them.

"Jedi Udra." he said, "We need you to come to the morgue immediately. One of my officers has just been killed."

"What killed him?" Tylo asked, "Was there something dangerous hidden inside one of those boxes in the bank vault?"

"I'm not at the bank." the inspector responded, "I'm at the morgue. The murder took place here."

"We're on our way." Jayk replied before turning off the communication system. Then he looked at Brae, "Fetch Cal." he told her, "I have a feeling that he will come in useful."

The city morgue was under guard when the crew of the *Swift Exit* arrived and as they approached the entrance a police officer moved to block their path.

"Inspector Callas summoned us here." Jayk said.

"Something about a body in the morgue." Tylo added and Brae winced as the police officer scowled.

"Go right in." the officer said, glaring at Tylo.

"Did you have to say that?" Brae whispered as they went inside where they found the building bustling with activity as morgue workers struggled to deal with the fact that bodies could no longer be accepted while the investigation was ongoing. The trio made their way straight to the morgue itself where they found more police guards who waved them straight inside to where Inspector Callas stood with several other police officers and also a senior administrator from the morgue.

"Inspector, what's happening?" Jayk asked.

"An officer had his neck broken." Inspector Callas replied before glancing towards where the medical examiner was being examined himself by a pair of paramedic droids, "The doctor claims that it was a one-armed man who fled the scene before anyone else arrived."

Tylo snorted.

"Has the doctor been sampling any of the chemicals in here?" he asked.

"Actually we do have other witnesses to the one armed man escaping." Inspector Callas said, "Plus we even have security footage to go with it. Our suspect is described as being humanoid, male, about two metres tall, of a muscular build and totally naked."

"How did a one-armed naked man get into here?" Brae asked.

"That's the really interesting thing." Inspector Callas said, "He didn't. Or at least not all at once. The doctor says that my officer was killed by the body we've been shipping in here in pieces. Apparently it was able to put itself back together and when the latest piece was delivered it escaped from its drawer, attacked both the examiner and the police officer, killing the officer in the process and then departed the scene."

"So there's a giant naked dead guy running around the city?" Tylo said, "I think that's actually a new one."

"Cal what do you think?" Jayk asked and Brae removed the holocron from her robes, setting it down on a table.

"What the hell is that?" Inspector Callas exclaimed as Cal's hologram then appeared.

"Inspector Callas, may I introduce Cal Udra. Former Jedi knight. Cal is the guardian of a holocron created a long time ago and holds the knowledge of a powerful Jedi." Jayk told him.

"Indeed I do." Cal added, "Well as you already know, animating dead flesh was a trick known to the Sith. It was probably intended as some sort of guardian."

"So what will it protect now?" Brae asked.

"That depends. If it was intended to protect a certain object then it will probably be connected to it through the Force and will make its way towards it. On the other hand if it was a bodyguard for an individual being then it attempt to locate them. Of course since they are unlikely to be anywhere on this planet it will wander around following anything it sees that reminds it of its duty." Cal explained.

"Are you certain that it's a guard of some sort?" Jayk asked.

"No, not entirely and that could have an effect on its behaviour. If it's a soldier then without a controller there's no telling what it could do." Cal said.

"What would this controller be?" Inspector Callas asked, "Is it a person or a device?"

"It could be either." Cal answered, "A Sith lord would always want to be able to control his creations but there could also be times when he would want to delegate that control."

"Having an army of a million is no good if you have to watch what every last soldier is doing all the time." Brae commented.

"Exactly," Cal agreed, nodding, "and rather than create fully thinking soldiers that could turn on them the Sith would sometimes create control devices that their subordinates could use to control their creations instead of the Sith lord in person. Of course such a device would not be able to overrule orders from the Sith lord that created the creatures. Or at least not if it was made properly. I seem to remember hearing about a few errors made over the millennia."

"Will the body being incomplete affect it's behaviour?" the inspector asked.

"It could. What exactly was missing?" Cal responded.

"Its left arm from just below the elbow." the inspector answered.

"In that case I suggest finding that missing piece. The creature may have a connection to it through the Force that will motivate it to seek out what it needs to complete itself."

"Seal the bank vault." Tylo suggested, "If the missing arm is in there then the vault door ought to keep it out."

"Or we could trap it inside." Inspector Callas said, a smile spreading across his face, "If we let it into the vault then we can amass enough firepower to bring it down as soon as the door is opened again. Assuming that the bank security droids aren't capable of doing that themselves."

"Sounds like a plan." Tylo said, looking at Jayk.

"Ye it might work. But there is something else that bothers me." the Jedi responded.

"The sphere master?" Brae asked and Jayk nodded.

"You and I sensed the Dark Side from it. I sense that it maybe related to this creature in some way, possibly it is the control device." he said.

"Does that mean we can use it to control the thing that killed my officer?" Inspector Callas said.

"If only it was that easy." Tylo commented.

"Using artefacts crafted by the Dark Side rarely comes without a cost inspector. The Jedi Order has prohibited Jedi from using Sith artefacts for thousands of years." Jayk said.

"Then what good is it?" the inspector said.

"The creature will have a link to the control device just like its missing appendage." Cal answered, "It'll be able to home in on the sphere."

"Which means we need to make sure that it is secured." Jayk said, "Just in case the creature tries to obtain it before its missing hand. We must return to the *Swift Exit* as quickly as possible."

4.

The entrance to the bank had been left unlocked and unguarded, monitored remotely from the security office while more than twenty police officers remained concealed close by. This meant little to the creature that came walking up to the bank doors, however and rather than pause to pull open the door it swung a fist at the toughened glass of the doors and smashed its way through. This embedded splinters of glass in its flesh not only when it struck the glass but also as it stepped through the hole and cut itself in the process. But no blood flowed from any of the wounds and instead they acted to heal themselves automatically, ejecting the fragments of glass from the creature's flesh.

The police watched this from their hiding places, gripping their blasters tightly just in case the creature sensed their presence somehow and attempted to escape. Instead the creature proceeded down the ramp that led into the vault and it was only here that it finally encountered any opposition. As soon as the creature stepped through the open vault doorway the heavy blast door suddenly swung shut behind it and from either side a pair of security droids marched towards the creature.

"Your presence here is unauthorised." one of the two machines called out, "You will surrender immediately." The creature refused to bow to this demand though and instead turned directly towards one of the advancing droids. Then it charged at the machine that in response raised an arm that had a built in blaster and opened fire. As civilian security rather than military droids, the bank security droids were equipped with non-lethal weaponry only and a torrent of stun blasts struck the creature. Though more powerful than the sidearm carried by the police officer at the morgue, these had no more effect on the creature than that had. Seeing how ineffective its blaster was the droid instead switched to a close combat mode and prepared to meet the creature's charge. What the droid did not expect was for the creature to leap into the air and hurl itself directly at the machine, crashing into its chest and knocking it backwards. Landing on top of the droid, the creature then grabbed hold of its built in blaster by the barrel before tearing the entire limb free and throwing it aside. Then before the droid could either push the creature off its chest or attempt to stand up the creature repeated this procedure by tearing off one of its legs, leaving the machine thrashing its remaining limb about wildly as the creature finally got up of its chest and turned to face the second droid while still holding the leg in its hand.

As the second droid broke into a run towards the creature it threw the leg at the machine. The droid batted this aside effortlessly but it still gave the creature a moment of opportunity and that was all it needed to leap up towards the ceiling in a jump that required the channelling of the Dark Side to execute where it was able to grab hold of a reinforcing beam and lift itself up before the droid could reach it. The droid looked up as it stood beneath the creature and reached up to try and pull it down from the ceiling but it was the creature that acted first and it leapt back down onto the droid, landing on its shoulders. Hooking its one complete arm around the droid's neck the creature then proceeded to rip its head right off and the decapitated droid staggered back and forth before it came crashing down beside its comrade.

In the security office the feed from the visual second droid was suddenly cut off while that from the first remained erratic while it was unable to rise.

"It's in the vault." a bank employee told the police sergeant standing behind him, "It's trapped but both droids are down."

"Never mind that. We've got an entire tactical team here." the sergeant replied, "Even if it manages to get out before the Jedi turn up to deal with it then my men will bring it down."

Inside the vault the creature carried the blaster arm it had torn off the first droid as it made its way down the central passageway. The blaster was inoperable without the power and control mechanism but that was not why the creature wanted it. Instead when it turned into one of the rooms filled with storage units it walked up to one of them and wedged the blaster through the handle used to open the unit. Then it began to pull at the blaster, using it as a lever to apply force to the lock. Its strength amplified significantly by the process used to create it, the creature was able to break the lock and the door came off the storage unit.

Within this there were more packages wrapped in cloth and held closed by cord with enough pieces of crystal woven into it that it sparkled under the lights of the vault. Opening the first of these the creature revealed a strange cylinder that was hollow at one end while the other terminated in a collection of tubes. The creature then inserted the stump of its left arm into the hollow end of this and there was a hissing sound as it sealed against the creature's flesh. Pointing this across the room the creature snarled as there was a humming sound that grew in intensity as pale blue lightning sparked between the rods at the end of the device now mounted on the stump of its arm until this lightning leapt out from the weapon and struck the wall of storage units on the other side of the room, blasting off their doors and setting light to any of the contents

that were combustible. Satisfied that its weapon was functional, the creature then turned its attention back to the storage unit where it had been kept and began to open more of the packages held inside to reveal plates of a strange metal that were shaped to fit over various parts of an enlarged humanoid body.

Outside the vault the police tactical team moved into position, deploying behind portable blast shields and pointing an assortment of blaster rifles and pistols towards the door. With the vault door sealed the members of the tactical team considered the creature inside to be trapped but were prepared just in case it was somehow able to override the locking mechanism. However, what happened next came as a complete surprise.

"We have movement near the door. No visible target." the sergeant monitoring the damaged security droid's data feed told the tactical team when the sound of footsteps was heard but nothing appearing within the limited viewing angle of the droid's visual receptors.

"Stand by." the team leader outside the vault ordered, expecting perhaps a brief attempt to physically attack the vault door from the inside.

Instead there was no faint pounding of a bare fist against a blast door but a dull red glow began to appear near the centre of the door and this slowly began to widen.

"What the hell is that?" the sergeant in the security room said as the security droid's feed captured an image of a lightning storm passing by it towards the inside of the vault door.

"I'm getting abnormal temperature readings." the security guard said, looking at the environmental readings for the vault.

"Team leader, report." the sergeant said.

"The vault door's melting." the team leader replied, "I don't know what sort of weapon was inside but that thing's got it now and it's burning right through that door like it's not even there."

"Breach!" another member of the tactical team shout as a lump of molten metal dropped from the middle of the vault door onto the floor.

"Hold fire. Wait for a target." the team leader ordered, knowing that to fire an entire squad's worth of blasters now would just accelerate the destruction of the blast door that was all that was keeping the Sith creature inside the vault.

The damage to the door expanded and more glowing metal dropped to the floor, revealing the lightning inside the vault and only then did the team leader decide that the aperture was large enough for the team members to reliably shoot through.

"Open fire!" he ordered and in unison the tactical team opened fire.

Without being able to see the creature the tactical team instead aimed for the centre of the hole in the blast door, hoping that even if they could not hit the creature itself then they could maybe force it back deeper into the vault. As hoped the storm of lightning did cease as the volley of blaster fire entered the vault but this was not because the creature had been injured or forced to retreat and there was a sudden high pitched whistling sound as a spinning metal disc came flying out through the hole to strike one of the team members in his neck and decapitated him. Then before the severed head could even hit the floor a second disc flew through the hole and struck one of the blast shields. The razor sharp disc penetrated deep enough to embed itself in the arm of the police officer holding it in front of him and he cried out in pain.

It was then that the lightning started up again only this time it was not aimed at the blast door. This time the bright energy flowed out through the hole already present in the centre of the blast door and expanded to envelope several members of the tactical team, hurling all of them backwards and causing them to scream in agony as the storm of Dark Side energy continued to burn their flesh. Then the lightning ceased again as the creature turned its weapon back on the blast door itself, delivering a powerful blast that shattered a section large enough to permit a humanoid to pass through with relative ease. This sent fragments of red hot metal flying all around and the remaining members of the tactical team were compelled to take cover behind their blast shields.

While they were taking cover the creature finally made its appearance, stepping through the hole it had created in the vault door. But this was not the naked figure that had entered the vault and disabled the security droids using just its own strength and agility. Now the creature was covered from head to toe in overlapping armoured plates while its missing arm had now been replaced by the Force lightning gun. On its other arm the creature's armour featured another weapon, one designed to dispense the spinning discs that could then be hurled at a target with deadly effect.

As soon as the creature emerged from inside the vault it opened fire again, unleashing a storm of lightning while also hurling more of the sharpened discs at other members of the tactical team. Meanwhile behind the creature smoke began to billow out of the vault from the flames caused by a mix of both the tactical team's blaster fire and also the creature itself test firing the Force lightning gun.

Now that they had a clear target the tactical team opened fire again and the creature jerked under multiple blaster hits at close range but the armour now covering its body had, like the Force lightning gun and the creature's body itself been created using Sith sorcery and the energy bolts could not penetrate. On the other

hand the creature's weapons were more than adequate to penetrate the body armour worn by the tactical team and it took just over a minute from stepping out of the vault for the creature to kill them all. Unconcerned about the ramifications of killing police officers, the creature then calmly retraced its steps up into the bank lobby and to the entrance it had smashed its way through. Here it encountered more police officers as reinforcement units parked speeders in front of the bank and the officers took cover behind them. The creature paused just outside the bank entrance and looked around. It counted a dozen police officers hiding behind six speeders. All of them were armed with blaster pistols but none of them were aiming at the creature, instead knowing what had happened to the tactical team guarding the vault they were doing their best to keep out of the line of fire until heavier reinforcements could arrive. Given this absence of a clear threat the creature turned to face the direction it could sense the call of its controller in and started to walk towards it, passing through the police line without a single shot being fired at it.

5.

"Play it again." Jayk said when the footage of the creature emerging from the bank finished. Inspector Callas had hurried to the *Swift Exit* to deliver the news of what had happened in person, bringing with him all of the footage available from the bank security cameras as well as those mounted in the street outside and in the police speeders that the creature had ignored,

"What for?" Tylo asked, "It's still going to be an armoured killing machine that just took out an entire police tactical team and burned the bank to the ground in the process."

"I want to take a look at how it reacts to different situations." Jayk said, "It killed the tactical team but ignored the patrol officers outside the bank."

"The patrols didn't engage it." Inspector Callas said, "As the thing advanced towards them they fell back."

"It didn't see them as a threat." Brae commented.

"That tactical team wasn't much of a threat either." Tylo pointed out, "Their blasters did nothing to it."

"But they were in its way." Cal said, "On the other hand the patrol officers allowed it to pass."

"And let me guess," Tylo said, "that thing is heading this way."

"It is." Cal replied.

"It's after this isn't it master?" Brae asked and she held up the carved sphere and Jayk nodded.

"If what Cal says is true then I believe so." he said.

"Of course I telling you the truth." Cal protested, "The council didn't assign me to lie to you."

"Oh great, so we've got a superhuman killing machine wandering the city and the one thing it wants is right here with us." Tylo said, "What if we destroy it? Or just leave the planet with it? Will that thing shut down?"

"Unlikely." Cal answered, "The controller is connected to the creature via the Force so even if we take it to another system the creature will still be able to sense it. As for destroying it, I can't tell you what the effect would be. It could be like taking a leash off a wild rancor in the middle of a city. It'll run amok and kill everything in its path."

"And what if it gets hold of the controller?" Tylo said.

"Probably the same. Without instructions then it will do what comes naturally to it and this thing was created to kill." Cal said.

"What help can the local government be?" Brae asked, looking at the inspector.

"Minimal." he replied, "We can help track the thing using public safety cameras and police patrols but that's about it. You saw what it did to a fully armed tactical team and Garrandon doesn't even have a militia, let alone a standing army to get heavy weapons from."

"We don't need to worry about tracking it." Jayk said, "We already know that it is on its way here for the controller. Perhaps we can use that to our advantage."

"How?" Tylo said.

"Cal what will it take to destroy this creature?" Jayk said, looking at the hologram.

"What about an air attack? We can use the *Swift Exit's* turret to take the thing out." Tylo said.

"That would only work if we could guarantee to be able to draw it out into the open." Jayk replied, "Even then accuracy will be an issue and the collateral damage could be severe."

"Well destroying it is going to depend on the exact nature of the armour it's wearing and its ability to regenerate damage." Cal said, "I'd say that this particular creature was created by a pretty powerful Sith lord, though that covers a wide range of possibilities. Obviously it will take more firepower than a blaster rifle can provide. A lightsaber might be enough but getting close enough to use one might be difficult."

"That all depends on whether or not it is focused on Brae or myself." Jayk said, "If we can divert the creature's attention elsewhere then perhaps Brae and I can get closer. Alternately we may be able to lead it into a trap of a different sort."

According to its schedule, the construction site would be a fully functioning industrial complex capable of manufacturing a wide range of goods within the next three months. During the hours of daylight it swarmed with both organic and droid construction workers while after dark a mainly droid workforce handled the delivery of the materials that would be required for the next day's work. Now though the site was considered ideal for luring the Sith creature into an ambush. By evacuating all of the organic workers, the risk to innocent bystanders could be minimised while the incomplete nature of the buildings offered the crew of the *Swift Exit* more options for rapidly moving between structures using the scaffolding that surrounded and interconnected them.

The local police tracked the creature from a distance, using aerial observation to monitor its heading and deploying officers on speeder bikes ahead of the creature to get civilians out of its path just in case it interpreted them as hostile. This meant that as the creature approached the edge of the construction site the

crew of the *Swift Exit* were ready for it.

The creature's arrival was announced by a blast from its Force lightning gun that blew a hole in the perimeter wall wide enough to allow a speeder to pass through. The creature strode through this hole with its weapons held high, ready to engage any targets that presented themselves.

"It's here." Jayk said into his comlink from his vantage point in one of the half built structures, "Tylo are you ready?"

"Does it matter if I say 'no'?" Tylo responded.

"Not now. I'd say that thing is about two minutes away from your position." Jayk told him, "Brae stand by."

"Ready master." she answered.

Tylo stood in the empty doorway of a building that was almost complete and in one hand he held a transparent plastic case that held the Sith control device in a manner that allowed it to be seen while avoiding the risk of Tylo remaining in physical contact with the Dark Side artefact. As the Sith creature came striding around the corner at the end of the street Tylo held this up so that it could see the artefact but not risk firing on him without hitting the artefact inside.

"It's here. It's seen me." Tylo broadcast as the creature began to walk towards him, both its weapons pointed at him.

"Yes, I see it now." Jayk responded, "Brae are you in position?"

"Yes master."

"Good. Tylo, run."

Tylo did not respond to this order, instead he just backed into the building so that he was out of sight and began to run. Though it could not see Tylo any more the creature could sense the direction he was in from the disturbance that the controller created in the Force and it too broke into a run, heading for the doorway Tylo had been stood in moments earlier.

Jayk and Brae watched this from the scaffolding surrounding two neighbouring buildings and just before the creature could reach the doorway they both leapt into the air and activated their lightsabers. Landing side by side they faced the creature with their weapons held up in front of them. Immediately the creature came to a halt. It could sense the controller getting further away but it had standing orders concerning jedi and these took priority over its instinct to reach its controller. Without breaking its stride the creature fired its Force lightning gun at Jayk, identifying him as the greater threat and a storm of Force lightning erupted from its weapon.

Jayk blocked the attack with his lightsaber, absorbing the Dark Side energy into his blade but the creature did not give up and Jayk knew that it was only a matter of time before he would be unable to hold it back any further. Fortunately for him Brae chose that moment to intervene and she charged forwards, hoping to be able to take advantage of the creature's distraction. However, the creature was able to engage more than one target at once and it unleashed a spinning disc at Brae. Seeing this she leapt aside but nevertheless still took the time to swipe at the spinning disc with her lightsaber, cutting it in two. As the two halves of the disc dropped to the ground Brae found herself within striking distance of the creature and she wasted no time in launching an attack. Swinging her lightsaber blade horizontally she struck the creature's armoured torso in its side. Against ordinary metal plate armour her lightsaber would have cut right through with minimal effort but whatever sorcery had been involved in the manufacture of the armour covering the creature had given it the capability of resisting its blade. Brae pressed harder, hoping to be able to overcome the unnatural resilience of the armour with brute force. The creature did not just stand still while under attack though and it ceased its own attack on Jayk to turn its full attention to Brae, turning around and lashing out with an armoured fist. The sudden an unexpected blow caught Brae off guard and she was hurled backwards by the blow that struck the side of her face.

The creature stepped forwards as Brae landed on her back and took aim with its Force lightning gun but just at the moment it fired Jayk reached out through the Force and pulled its arm aside, sending the lightning bolts into the wall of the nearby building and blasting a large hole in it.

"Brae are you injured?" Jayk asked as the creature turned back towards him.

"No master." Brae gasped in reply while reaching out for her dropped lightsaber.

The creature unleashed another brief blast from its Force lightning gun that Jayk parried before ceasing fire. Next the creature raised its Force lightning gun to point upwards at an angle before firing over Jayk's head. The lightning spread out as it travelled and it struck the scaffolding around the nearby building over a wide area before arcing even further across it. The fasteners used to keep the various component parts of the scaffolding together as well as to secure it to the wall rapidly melted and gave way under this attack and the scaffolding suddenly came crashing down.

"Brae look out!" Jayk yelled as he dived out of the way while his niece was just getting to her feet. Looking up she saw the scaffolding falling towards her and she too attempted to leap out of the way. However, neither jedi was quite fast enough to avoid the falling debris and Jayk extended his arm upwards, calling on the Force to create a bubble of telekinetic energy around himself and Brae that sheltered them from it. This left them in a hollow within the piles of debris on the ground as the scaffolding came crashing down around them

but neither of the Jedi was injured by it.

Meanwhile the creature raised its Force lightning gun higher and unleashed another sustained blast of energy that deflected or broke up most of the debris heading for it so that all that it was hit by was smaller pieces that could not pierce its armour. With the Jedi both buried beneath the debris the creature then turned its attention back to what had brought it to the construction site in the first place, the control unit that Tylo carried and was getting further away all the time.

6.

Tylo heard the sound of the scaffolding collapsing on one side of the building and he paused, turning to look back in the direction he had come. The building he was inside was largely open plan and though he had moved up several levels he could see the windows on the side of the building he had started from and through them he could see the remains of the scaffolding hanging from the outside wall.

"Stang." he muttered, "I've got a bad feeling about this." and rather than wait to see what happened next he started to run once more.

He made his way to a window on the far side of the building where he was able to climb out onto the scaffolding that was still present and stable on this side of the building. From here he could see a walkway that extended across the gap between this building and the next and this was where he headed. He was half way across this walkway when all of a sudden Tylo heard a whistling sound and instinctively he ducked just in time for a spinning metal disc to fly through the air where his head had been. Turning around he saw the creature now climbing out of the same window he had used to exit the building onto the scaffolding. Quickly he held up the container holding the control device and the creature lowered its arm as Tylo began to back away slowly. With no signs of the Jedi Tylo reached for the heavy blaster pistol holstered at his waist. Given the inability of the police tactical team to stop the creature Tylo doubted that the relatively powerful handgun would be of much use but having a weapon, any weapon in his hand still made him feel more secure.

Firing three rapid shots at the creature while it walked towards the walkway only served to convince Tylo that his blaster was inadequate for the task at hand as each shot was absorbed by the creature's armour. The creature aimed its Force lightning gun at Tylo but did not fire while the control unit was held up in front of him and this gave Tylo an idea.

"Stop!" he called out, pressing the muzzle of his blaster against the container he held in his other hand and for a moment the creature came to a halt before it started to advance again, stepping onto the walkway with Tylo, "Oh great." he said to himself as he continued to back away, "Now what do I do?"

"Tylo the walkway!" Jayk's voice called out from below and looking over the side of the walkway Tylo saw both Jayk and Brae rushing along the street towards him.

Tylo knew immediately what Jayk meant but in his current position he could not carry out the Jedi's instruction. Instead he continued to back away from the creature, picking up his pace to maintain the gap between them as the creature followed him. When he reached the scaffolding attached to the next building Tylo suddenly pointed his blaster down at the end of the walkway and fired repeatedly. Each shot punched a fist sized hole in the lightweight plating until there was a split running across the entire width.

Seeing what Tylo was doing the creature broke into a run though it still did not dare fire on Tylo while he held the control device in front of himself. This did not stop Tylo from continuing what he was doing, however and he pressed the muzzle of his blaster to each of the handrails that were now the only things holding the walkway up in turn and fired.

Severing the first of the handrails caused the walkway to twist under its own weight and also that of the running creature. The creature was able to grab hold of the remaining handrail and avoid falling from the walkway at that moment but Tylo immediately moved on to this remaining rail and fired again, leaving the walkway totally unsupported at his end.

The walkway promptly collapsed, swinging downwards and striking the ground below end first. Had it been made of more sturdy materials the walkway could have stopped there, forming a ramp leading up to the scaffolding on the building Tylo had fled from but instead the walkway began to crumple and break into smaller pieces as it continued to fall. This left the creature tumbling uncontrollably to the ground until it landed heavily and came rolling off the still disintegrating walkway.

The creature was nevertheless unscathed by the fall and it began to get back to its feet right away. Seeing the approach of the two Jedi it raised its Force lightning gun and fired, sending a wide spread of energy towards the pair of them. Brae reacted to this by throwing herself aside out of the path of the lightning but Jayk opted to use the Force to help him leap high into the air, moving in an arc that brought him back down to the ground right in front of the creature. As soon as he landed the creature turned to try and bring its Force lightning gun to bear on the Jedi but Jayk was too quick and he thrust his lightsaber forwards in a perfectly timed strike that sent the blade straight into the muzzle of the Sith weapon which promptly exploded, the blast hurling both Jayk and the creature apart.

As the creature began to get back to its feet Brae came charging at it and in response it raised its remaining weapon and fired at her, sending several spinning discs towards her. Brae easily swatted these aside though and after firing less than half a dozen of the projectiles at her the creature's weapon was left empty of ammunition. Now all the creature had left at its disposal was its brute strength and it lashed out with its ruined Force lightning gun arm at the Padawan as she came within reach. Brae blocked this attack with her

lightsaber, finding once again that the blade cut not easily cut through the material that the weapon was made of. This time though the creature itself pushed its attack hard and the force being applied permitted the lightsaber blade to dig into the weapon casing even as Brae was being forced down to her knees with the creature towering over her. Having seized the advantage the creature reached out and grabbed Brae by the neck, lifting her off the ground with the intention of choking her to death but it was at that moment that Jayk returned to the fray and he pushed the tip of his lightsaber between where two of the creature's armour plates overlapped at its shoulder and twisted it. This severed the arm holding Brae entirely and she dropped to the ground again, gasping for breath as the arm fell away from her and she dropped her lightsaber. The creature tried to turn to face Jayk but he moved too quickly, darting around behind it and striking again. This time he targeted the back of one of the creature's knees where there was a visible gap in its armour and this brought it crashing down in a heap.

"The Sith are dead." Jayk said, looking down at the flailing creature and then he used the Force to call Brae's lightsaber to him, igniting it so that he wielded a weapon in each hand, "It is time for you to join them." and then he brought both lightsaber blades down either side of the creature's neck before cutting through from both sides simultaneously and decapitating it.

Inspector Callas stood with the crew of the *Swift Exit* and watched as the pieces of the creature were packed up in separate containers to be shipped back to the Jedi temple on Coruscant.

"Aren't you worried about that thing coming back to life on your ship?" he asked and Jayk smiled.

"No. As long as we keep the different parts away from the head it will be safe enough." he replied, "Hopefully by studying it the Jedi Order will be able to determine how Thal N'Krey obtained it."

"A pity so much of his other stuff was destroyed in the fire in the vault." Tylo commented.

"We still have some of his notebooks and the jump co-ordinates." Brae pointed out and Jayk nodded.

"Yes we do," he agreed, "and for now at least I'm going to consider that a win."