

GJW XIII Small Team Co Op Fiction

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[GDOC Link](#)

“The Unspeakable Crystal”

Sadowan Consular Ship En-Route to Thillon Research Facility

The gentle thrum of lightspeed engines was a soothing, almost comforting sound - unmistakably mechanical, but at just the right frequency to soak into the bones and muscles of a weary warrior and lull him to sleep if he was travelling alone.

Fortunately, Manji was not travelling alone - less fortunately, he was currently sharing a cockpit someone who might be charitably described as a blood-crazed wampa on steroids. His former student, Macron Goura was silent in the pilot's chair of the ship, but his neurotic twitching and occasional vocal outbursts gave the lie to his outward calm. His one good eye closed, Manji was stretched out in the co-pilot's chair attempting to relax.

“So, what's the plan, Master?” Macron interjected, interrupting the grizzled Kyataran's train of thought. “They probably won't be happy to see us.”

His jaw cracking with a yawn, Manji stretched, feeling his muscles popping back into alignment. He'd spent too many years going soft on Kyataru - space travel wasn't a day-to-day occurrence on that backwater world, and his body was still adjusting to it.

“The negotiations will be short. Just remember that we’re here for a job, alright? This ain’t just a good old-fashioned killing spree.”

Macron giggled, a disquieting sound. “Of course, Master. I’d never dream of doing anything *too* crazy.”

Manji’s eye snapped open as he glanced across at Macron, mild alarm and confusion playing across his face. “Why is that the most disturbing thing I’ve heard all day?” he muttered.

Suddenly, an alert started beeping on the ship’s control panel. “Ah! Wonderful,” Macron grunted. “We’re coming up on the station now. Dropping out of lightspeed...”

The ship jolted as it shifted out of hyperspace, the blue whirl of spiralling stars around it becoming the regular white pinpricks of space. Leaning forward in his seat, Manji peered out of the viewscreen for his first glimpse of the listening post - a large, four-pointed star of a facility silhouetted against the vast blue gas giant of Thillon and one of its small moons.

“Looks like we’re the first ones here,” he said, “But you can bet it won’t stay that way. Let’s take her in and kill some folks.”

Loading Dock

Thillon Research Facility

The loading dock was pristine in the Imperial fashion; smooth, reflective floors and piles of crates and fuel stations organised with ruthless efficiency. A small detachment of Principate soldiers - around 10 in total - watched as the Sadowan ship glided down, their blasters held ready. At their head stood a Twi’lek sergeant, her face as scarred as her battle-worn armour. “Easy, boys,” she murmured as the ship’s landing gear touched down, jets of steam venting from the underside of the craft. “Don’t give them an inch...”

The ship’s landing ramp opened and two men emerged - one tall and wiry, dressed in some kind of strange robe - a dress of some sort? One of his eyes was covered by what looked like a sword guard fashioned into an eyepatch and tied around his head with leather cord, and his long black and silver hair was scraped back into a high ponytail. He carried two exotic-looking sword hilts, thrust through the belt of his strange dress - although, as he moved closer, the sergeant could tell that they were lightsabers rather than swords. Her knuckles tightened around her electro-staff almost involuntarily.

The other man was a fraction taller but broader, his face a mess of scar tissue and painted designs and one artificial eye- he wore a thick suit of armour, all jagged edges and ridges of some strange material. A ghoulish grin was plastered across his features and the sergeant felt a shudder run down her spine at the sight. Steeling herself, she stepped forwards and raised her voice.

“Halt! What business do you have on this facility?” she demanded. “This station is under the control of the Severian Principate-”

“What do you think, Master?” the scarred one said, looking over at his companion. “She is a Twi’lek. I know you have a soft spot.”

The sergeant gritted her teeth, her fury spiking as the dress-wearing one responded. “You know I never mix business with pleasure, kid-”

“What about that time on Sepros?” the scarred one giggled. The sergeant had heard enough. Her electro-staff crackled to life with a violent hum as she levelled it towards the two strange men.

“Get back on your ship and leave, *immediately*,” she snarled. “Or you will be removed by force!”

The dress-wearing one grinned at her, his teeth gleaming like a shark’s. “*Force*, eh?” he chuckled. “Now, why didn’t I think of that?”

Suddenly, a wave of telekinetic energy smashed into the Twi’lek and the guards behind her, hurling them off their feet. As the sergeant struggled up onto her knees, instantly feeling the pain of the impact, she heard the unmistakable *snap-hiss* of lightsabers igniting.

“Well, well,” giggled the scarred one as his Master’s telekinesis hit the foes before them. Instead of following suit, he drew a single lightsaber and ignited it. The tangerine light illuminated his scars gruesomely. “Manji-sama, I rather think I’d like to fight them up close and *personal*. Break their bodies and their will to live.”

His Master wasted no time on a reply and was already swiftly moving in on the leader with the electrostaff. Twin argent blades snapped up in a scissor-block and neatly stopped the crackling staff weapon. The Twilek Sergeant’s weapon reversed direction and the former butt end of the staff rotated to attack as the front was pulled up and

away from the lightsaber block. A practiced stroke of the dress-wearing man's right blade deflected the polearm sideways with a shower of sparks. He stomped his forward foot and shouted as an overhand attack from his left blade stroked towards her. She was not fooled, and the riposte from her staff was deflected to the inside upper left by the waiting blade borne in the robed man's right hand.

Behind him the armored man stomped ahead laughing evilly. The guards could not direct blaster fire at the pair dueling with melee weapons, so they directed it at the madman coming towards them instead. Most of the shots were deflected by the tangerine blade in his right fist. A few others splashed against a briefly erected invisible wall of Dark Side energy, from the field emanating from the projector carried on his back, or the armorweave black cloak he wore. One even hit the man's body directly as he closed on the first soldier. Surely the shot would take him down.

But it didn't. It was like the man's armor had taken some of the impact, and the body underneath it had hardened like durasteel. The soldier's jaw dropped in disbelief mere instants before his head, blaster and right arm were swept from his body by the searing orange blade of his assailant. The victim's arm was caught by the madman's off-hand and propelled at the soldier behind him like a spinning bloody club powered by the Force.

Beside the carnage the sergeant and the dress-wearing man dueled. The sergeant was good, but she could tell the man in the flowing clothes was merely toying with her, testing her to see if she would be a worthy foe. His movements wasted no energy and were extremely efficient, his body mechanics practiced for fluid delivery of maximum strength. This was a warrior of another calibre entirely.

Her stabbing strikes and sweeping rotational parries with the electrostaff were hitting a solid and deliberate wall of silver that brutally shunted her away. She struck, swung and lunged. Always he shunted her to the side, stepped out of her alignment, or counter-rotated her strike with a hard stroke of his own searing weapon. His good eye squinted as he gauged her martial measure. For a moment, their weapons clashed and locked with a shower of sparks and her focus was drawn to the battle raging on nearby.

Fuelled by some dark urgency, the scarred one hurled himself at the other soldiers. Before the Sergeant could blink three more had fallen to his tangerine blade. One had been knocked unconscious by his deceased friend's telekinetically propelled arm. Two had lost limbs, guts, and parts to the hungry orange lightsaber. The remaining six backed up and directed a hail of blasterfire at the madman that stalked them. The

armored man stomped down hard on the unconscious soldier's neck, breaking it as he covered his own torso from the nearly overwhelming weapon-fire. "Dammit. Can't advance," the Sith grunted as he deflected bolt after bolt. "Ideas?"

The lean robed figure grinned wickedly, his lone eye locked on the Twi'lek's face. "One moment," his voice almost a guttural growl. The robe-clad man struck high twice with staccato blows and drew his enemy's attention and electrostaff upwards. With a sudden exertion of strength he hurled the Sergeant backwards with a Force-imbued pistoning knee to her midsection, breaking the stalemate and launching her off her feet. In almost the same motion, he turned and threw out a fist clenched around the hilt of his saber with three fingers extended, unleashing another burst of telekinetic energy towards the soldiers.

As the blast hit them they began to fumble their weapons and stagger. The cessation in fire allowed the armored man to focus. The ghoulish figure raised his off-hand and screamed in a harsh guttural ancient language. "**Midwan, Asha!**" As he lowered his hand bolts of azure power snaked from his fingertips like cables of sizzling hate to strike all six soldiers as they attempted to rise. The smell of ozone and stinking burned flesh quickly permeated the stale air. A few seconds was all it took to fry them to their knees as their bones showed intermittently through their jumpsuits. The red-armored man laughed maniacally and then coughed as the enemies fell. He placed his hands on his knees for a second to gather his breath. "Ugh."

"Not much I can do with that sort of fire on me," wheezed the madman. He strode over to the smoking carcasses and began to neatly strike each one in the head with his salmon-colored lightsaber. "But they're all done now. I've got to make sure, you know? You taught me that."

"Truly." The dress-wearing man smiled briefly. "Leave no living enemies behind you. It's a good rule of thumb for a warrior." The one-eyed man looked at his supine foe impassively and felt for his own center. It did not falter. This woman was not his equal. Even so an injured animal could still cause havoc. He stepped back, gathered his breath, and awaited the inevitable counterattack.

Pushing herself upright, the Twi'lek let out a shout of frustration and anger at the sight of her scorched and dismembered squad. Fists tightening around her crackling staff, she leapt to her feet and charged at the dress-wearing man again. She hurled an aggressive two-handed crushing strike with both hands at one end of her weapon towards his head. If it had landed it would have killed almost anyone dead.

With a loud, wordless shout, her enemy moved with stunning alacrity and split her electrostaff in two at the center with a brutal strike from one shimmering silver blade as it arced into her swing. The other blade rotated counterclockwise and swept upwards, chopping off her left forearm at the wrist. As she recoiled in shock, he hit her with the swiftly reversed butt of the now shut-off left hand lightsaber precisely between the eyes. She dropped like a rock. She was not dead, but stone-cold unconscious. The robed man drew a deep breath, relaxed and returned his now-unlit lightsaber hilts to his belt. He exhaled quietly.

Analysis Station 06

Thillon Research Facility

A bank of consoles blinked fitfully, lighting up with warnings that nobody was reading. The analysis station was eerily silent apart from the buzzing and beeping of systems that were keeping various analytical instruments running. The room had been built in an octagonal shape, clustered around a central containment chamber. Currently, a baleful light flickered from the windows of the containment chamber - a light that didn't look like it belonged.

Loading Dock

"Wakey wakey, sleeping beauty..." Manji said, kneeling over the prone form of the Twi'lek sergeant. Her eyes slowly fought their way open as consciousness returned to her - for a minute her gaze stayed unfocused, then it sharpened into a glare as she realised her predicament.

"You **scum**-" she managed to hiss before the Kyataran cut her off. "We can exchange pleasantries later, darling," he said. "Right now, you can save yourself some pain and us some time and tell us where you're keeping that crystal."

The Sergeant managed to eke out a cold smirk, fighting down the waves of pain that were throbbing up from her dismembered wrist. "You're nothing more than thieves," she growled. "And I will never betray the Principate-"

Manji sighed theatrically, pushing himself back up onto his feet. "Well. I tried to be nice. She's all yours, Macron."

The Twi'lek's eyes widened slightly as Manji moved away and the armoured Sith took his place, holding a combat syringe full of some kind of disquieting green liquid.

Kneeling down, Macron pushed his scarred and painted visage up close to hers, speaking in a low voice.

"This is a little cocktail of my own creation," he said. "First, you'll tell us what we want to know. Then you'll feel your internal organs dissolving, ever... so... **slowly**. It'll keep you alive just long enough to see your skin liquify and melt into a pool of goo."

The Twi'lek stared at him in shocked panic - she could tell he wasn't bluffing, and Macron's careful application of the Force had reinforced in her the deadly seriousness of her predicament. As he brought the syringe up towards her arm she broke, her composure shattered.

"Okay, okay-" she yelped. "The crystal's in station 6, in the analysis wing. They're doing tests on it. That's all I know, okay?"

For a moment the alchemist stared into her eyes, the syringe still hovering inches from her flesh as he probed her mind. Then he gave her a twisted smile and stood up, stowing the syringe in his armour.

"Good enough," he said. "Shall we, Manji-sama?"

"After you," the Kyataran responded, gesturing towards the far door of the loading dock. Macron hesitated for a second as the Twi'lek sergeant stared up at them, her breath still coming in short gasps. Then he leaned down, gauntlet closing around her slender neck. Her eyes widened suddenly before he *squeezed*, the crushgaunt obliterating her throat with a loud snap. The sergeant collapsed lifelessly to the floor as Macron walked away, Manji rolling his eyes as he followed.

Thillon Facility Tunnels

"As you wish Master." The armored Sith chattered to himself quietly. "Crystals... they have crystals. I love crystals. Crystals are my friend." Mismatched eyes scanned the walls of the facility for the precious gleam of Kyber. "I like new friends."

The robe-clad man spoke up. "Stay focused and keep your mind on the prize. A warrior's mind is sharp, like a fine blade." His own good eye was sweeping the area for potential threats. "Surely that was not the entirety of their guards."

“I think mine is more like a rusty serrated carving knife hahaha!” replied the scarred man. “But no, I’d expect their best will be at their vault, wherever that is. I’m looking forward to it! What fun.”

“Now we just have to figure out where the vault is. I’m sure they won’t have signs pointing to it, although that would have been most thoughtful of them.” The Kyataran pulled a small gourd from his belt, uncapped it and took a sip. “Thirsty work, all this walking.”

“I can point us in the right direction Master.” The armored man’s eyes closed briefly. “I can feel... feel it.” He pointed towards the right. “The Kyber lies in that direction. And there is life around it but I cannot say exactly how many. More than a few. And it all feels rather strange.”

“You’ve gotten better with that, my Apprentice. Sensory work with the Force was never really my forte outside of combat.” Manji replaced the gourd in his robes as both men turned to walk down the right-hand corridor. “I focused on other things.”

“Nor mine, Master. I have some small skill with it but there are many in the Clan who are much better. One cannot study all things or else you become a master of none.” The red-clad Juggernaut chuckled. “I have a lot to learn still.”

“You’ve been reading those Kyataran texts I sent you eh?” remarked Manji. “Good. There’s a wealth of useful information in there. That knowledge is timeless.”

“They remind me of the old Sith texts in a lot of ways. I cannot help but wonder if the Kyatarans were influenced by them at some point in the past.” Macron stopped to look at a placard written in Aurabesh on the wall. “Analysis and Processing Area. Chips, Dips, Chains, Whips. Haha!”

“Martial wisdom is a commonality among warrior cultures, Macron. If you study others you will find similar threads of thought among all of them. They are all valid in their own way.” The robed man frowned briefly. Ahead of them the grinding scrape of a metal door opening could be clearly heard. “Anyway, our lesson time is over. It is time to teach our new hosts instead.”

Both men drew lightsaber hilts almost as one.

Analysis Station 06

They had expected to be met with a hail of blaster fire - or some kind of resistance, at least. Instead, the door hissed open and a blanket of silence seeped out from within the analysis station. Moving slowly inside, their sabers drawn and humming fitfully, the Sadowans were taken aback by the quiet.

“Not much of a welcoming committee, huh?” muttered Manji, his good eye darting across the room. Banks of consoles stood around a central containment chamber, within which he could see a pedestal holding what looked like the crystal that they sought. It was throbbing, slow pulses of crimson light emanating from it. “Can you find us a way into that chamber?”

“Already on it, master,” Macron said, stowing his saber hilt. Tapping a few keys on the nearest console, he pulled up an operational menu with ease. “Nothing is secured - they weren’t expecting visitors. Opening the chamber...”

Steam and vapour hissed from the sealed edges of the containment chamber door as it vented, slowly sliding outwards. Deactivating his own saber, Manji walked around the consoles to reach the entrance. He could feel the Force throbbing from the crystal, tinged with something - something *other*, something dark. It was an intoxicating blend. Stepping through the portal, the Kyataran stopped suddenly as Macron followed him, his eyes pulled downwards.

“Wait-”

The floor of the containment chamber was littered with bodies - the researchers who had been working at this station. At first glance they appeared lifeless, crammed into the small chamber like it was a mass grave, their limbs splayed outwards and bodies twisted into unusual shapes. Peering over his Master’s shoulder, Macron let out an interested grunt.

“What the hell...” he muttered.

Suddenly, an intense flare of red light burst from the crystal, washing over both Sadowans and bathing the room in scarlet. As they flinched instinctively, the bodies on the floor began to twitch and convulse unnaturally, slowly beginning to lift themselves upright. The body nearest the Kyataran, a blonde-haired human, was the first to rise, lifting its head to stare at the two Dark Jedi. Two crimson-filled eye sockets stared expressionlessly at them for a second before the figure, no longer recognisably human, opened its toothless maw and began to emit a bloodcurdling, many-throated scream.

A quick snap of telekinetic force lashed out past the creature's shoulder, ensnaring the crystal and yanking it from the pedestal into Manji's outstretched hand as his other hand drew the saber hilt from his belt. Not looking away from the creature before them as more crimson-eyed monstrosities rose and joined in with the ululating cry, he turned his head back towards Macron.

"I think we need to get out of here, kid. Right. Kriffing. **Now.**"

"No kidding," shouted the madman as the two turned and beat feet out of the crystal chamber. "That felt... all **wrong**. But fascinating nonetheless! I think they may be merging together."

Behind them the howling corpses began to twist and flow in mind-boggling ways. The attention of the rugose creatures turned simultaneously towards the exit passage from the chamber and they began to move as one with increasing speed both towards each other and the corridor. The susurrus of wails began to change timbre and hit pitches entirely outside the range of normal vocal organs.

"Fascinating you say. Frell." The Kyataran stopped outside the chamber passage door and slammed an open palm heavily onto the door lock actuator. As the heavy blast door cycled downwards he breathed a sigh of relief. "Wrong is an understatement my apprentice. Still, what do you mean exactly? Now is not the time for you to be characteristically cryptic."

"Well, do you remember the Kwa ruins on Aeotheran and that decrepit gate tech that they supposedly had? Pfft. Thankfully we never got it working. That shavit never works right. It felt more like **that**. Not like the Force, nor a Dark Side necro-animation. Something **else** entirely. Something from outside this galaxy, hell from outside this darth-damned dimension." The Alchemist shrugged as he stood nervously on guard. "Stuff just has a way of going wrong around those sort of emanations from Outside. Bodies too. The vibrations interrupt the natural order. Twists things around. Quite bad for your complexion, you know. Haha." The Sith frowned, popped open his gauntlets and began chewing his fingernails off loudly with steel-clad teeth. "I'm actually feeling strong anxiety."

"Get a grip on yourself Macron. That doesn't sound promising. Those idiots must have been trying to use the crystal for some sort of gate-tech like you said. Looks like their experiment failed rather spectacularly. Nothing like some crawling squamous horrors to

make our evening more interesting. It's a good thing this thick door is about to be between us and them. Or It." Just then, a loud thunking sound came from the blast door as it stopped lowering. The lights flickered and went out. Dim bluish emergency lighting came up. "Kark. Not good." Both of the robed man's hands drew his unlit lightsaber hilts from his belt.

From beyond the door could be heard the gibbering howls of the melding former scientists. Both of the Dark Jedi backed away from the half-closed door as twisted limbs and cords of unidentifiable biomass began to reach out probingly from underneath. There was plenty of room for It to squeeze under the bulkhead door. The mass of quivering flesh burst forth like an enormous festering pimple from the opening with a squelching noise as it continued to moan and howl wetly. Flaps of flesh that had been men, women, and various aliens pulsed in and out as the horror began to liquefy even more.

"Damn, that's *sick*," muttered the Sith Adept as his mismatched eyes boggled from the obscene sight. "I've seen some heavy duty shavit in my time but this is something on another level entirely. Gate tech is bad juju."

The gelid monstrosity was immediately met with a ferocious telekinetic blast and lightning combination from the two Sadows as they each pointed a hand towards the enemy. It was a move they had practiced together many times. In the past the combination had proven quite effective on most human and alien species. In this case it did absolutely nothing. The mass of twisted flesh recoiled and then continued to move inexorably forward. There were no solid bones to break and the electricity simply peeled off the creature's surface.

"Any ideas about how to stop this ugly bastard?" asked the backpedaling one-eyed man sarcastically as his hands moved to throw masses of equipment using the Force in the path of the monstrosity to slow it down. "It's obviously dumb as a bantha. I'm going to guess slicing it up won't work either, the damn thing will probably just flow back together. Disgusting."

"Energy weapons obviously won't work," commented the Alchemist as he used the Dark Side to tear loose several heavy cabinets from the walls and toss them in front of the thing. "Molecular dissolution would work perhaps but I'm not carrying any acids. I think the effect will wear off though as it's matter eventually realigns with our reality though."

“Kid, we might be lunch and toilet water decoration by then. Keep it busy for a second.” The Kyataran’s good eye roved about their environment. Mastery of the field of battle was something his warrior’s mind was trained for. He spotted heavy insulated pipes with Aurabesh industrial warnings on them. “I have an idea. What about cold? I bet all that power usage back there needs a lot of cooling. Those cryopipes probably carry coolant for their equipment.”

“Ayah. That could work,” replied the madman as he channeled his inner hatred and threw a heavy hoversled down the hall at the creature with a shout. The thing seemed to flow around the mass when it struck, albeit slowly. “That laser cooled liquid helium is damn near absolute zero. Probably won’t kill it, but it might stop it long enough for us to split out of this craphole.”

Manji didn’t need telling twice. Channeling the Force inwards, he sprinted back across the room towards the monstrosity. Both his lit sabers flashed upwards and carved through the wall-mounted pipe, hacking a sizable chunk out of it and spraying coolant all over the creature as it lunged towards him. Leaping backwards and out of immediate danger, the Kyataran grinned as he heard the creature screaming, writhing as the liquid helium crystallised across it’s flesh.

Another swipe of his sabers opened up another pipe which vented forth it’s contents, and the two Sadowans backed away towards the door of the analysis station. Suddenly a computer panel to their left lit up, blaring an insistent alarm. A computerised voice rose above the cacophonous wails of the creature and the hiss of the ruptured coolant pipes.

“Coolant leak detected. Reactor unstable. Coolant leak detected-”

Manji and Macron glanced at each other, the realisation crossing both their minds as one. “Well, blowing it into space can’t hurt...” the Alchemist chuckled. Manji barked a short laugh in response, his good eye trained once again on the creature. “How do you feel about a race, my apprentice?” he quipped.

Before them, the monstrosity began to recover - as they watched, supercooled and frost-ridden skin cracked and re-formed, moving in a distressingly organic fashion. New mouths opened in places that mouths shouldn’t be, all of them screaming and snarling in voices that no sentient creature in the galaxy had ever heard. The Dark Jedi needed no further encouragement; the door of the analysis station slid open as they neared it and they turned away from the creature, sprinting down the crimson-painted corridor

beyond. Above the din of alarms and hellish screeching, the computerised voice continued to count down the demise of Thillon Research Facility.

“Reactor unstable. Point of no return reached. Evacuation protocol now in effect. Reactor unstable-”

Loading Dock

Principate soldiers and researchers flooded the dock, awash with confusion and fear. The alarm had jolted them into action, and the discovery of the mutilated bodies lying on the hangar floor confirmed that something was very wrong. They crowded onto the facility’s small shuttle fleet, most of which were already filled to capacity.

Macron and Manji skidded around the last corner and emerged into the loading dock - the continual acceleration of the reactor was starting to manifest in explosions all across the station, ripping chunks of it open and shaking the entire facility, knocking everyone off balance. As they headed for their ship, a small group of Principate soldiers caught sight of them.

“Hey, you! Hold it!” their commander shouted, raising his blaster. Before he could fire, an explosion blossomed to his left - dangerously close.

KROOOMMMM

Hurled off their feet, the squad slowly tried to recover their senses as the Dark Jedi ignored them, the ramp of their ship descending as they reached it. Suddenly, the commander heard another sound above the alarm sirens and the ringing in his ears - a squelching, horrifying sound, coming nearer.

As he turned, the monstrosity emerged from the corridor with frightening speed, propelling itself across the smooth durasteel floor and falling upon him. He had no time to scream before it engulfed him, absorbing him into the body of the creature. The rest of the squad lasted seconds longer before they too were consumed, the monster growing larger and more grotesque with every form that melted into it. As the Sadowan ship began to lift off, thrusters firing it into the air, the creature turned some of its many faces towards them. A spike of mangled biomass stabbed suddenly from its body, hurtling through the air towards the ship.

“Farckle that noise,” commented the armored man inside the Sadowan ship as his rear end slammed into the pilot’s chair and his hands grasping desperately for the control

stick. The ship juked and rolled as it exited the bay. Both men grabbed whatever they could as the inertial stabilizers kicked in.

“Deflectors up. This sonofagundark just won’t give up!” Outside the monstrosity’s probing tentacle hit the energized field and stopped. Moments later the ship was beyond the horror’s reach as the transport’s engines cycled up to full power.

The creature’s many-eyed howling attention turned rapidly towards the bright explosions that were beginning to rock the facility behind it. Swirling radioactive flames and burning debris billowed out from the deeper halls as the reactor finally edged into criticality. The creature was engulfed in piercing plasma and then disappeared from view as the distance between the ship and the burning station grew.

“I’m not surprised,” replied the one-eyed man as he clipped himself hastily into a seat harness, turned to his side, and dropped the pulsing crystal into a containment canister. “I hope this container is as solid as you say. I’d rather not see us get all blobby.”

“It will hold,” replied the armored man as he continued to work the ship’s controls. “It’s made of solid duranium and lead. Totally vac sealed. Damn thing weighs a ton. Besides, the crystal is not connected to a power source at the moment.” The small consular ship began to accelerate away from the exploding research station.

“Too bad this transport doesn’t pack turbolasers. I’d fancy blasting the ugly right off that nasty thing just to be sure.” The one eyed man gazed out the viewscreen at the event with his good eye. The pulses of colored plasma from the station’s agonized death throes were beautiful and silent in the vacuum of space. Both men could imagine what they sounded and felt like. “That’s quite a fireworks show really. I’ll bet you a bottle of fine Kyataran saké it blows like a cheap courtesan on Saturday night.”

“I will take that bet master,” the madman said smugly. “Reactor criticality is seldom as depicted in holonovels,” replied the Sith as he calmly checked his readouts. “It’s the heat and radiation that is the real killer with modern power systems. The explosions are generally secondary and not uncontrolled criticality. We’re far enough away that... er. Wait. Picking up a massive gamma ray spike.” Just then a massive glowing purple and white fireball erupted from the center of the facility as it dwindled behind them. “Except this time apparently,” frowned the Alchemist. “Druk me.”

“That certainly looked nuclear to me my good man,” said the robed man with a grin. “It really makes me wonder what they were using for power back there. That wine sure is going to taste good while I’m soaking in the hot mineral baths back on Kyataru.”

“That purple hue is pretty characteristic of an old-school uncontrolled uranium fission reaction. Right on the visible light edge of UV and gamma part of the spectrum.” The Sith’s mismatched eyes wandered over the readouts. “Dirty but cheap. I’m seeing high energy fission product spectra. I guess I owe you a bottle Manji-sama. You know, I really wish I could have gotten a specimen off that critter.”

“It’s probably better that you didn’t. For everyone.” The Kyataran unclipped his seat harness and turned around. He took a duffel bag that clanked out from behind his seat. One hand opened the waste chute in the cockpit, and the other dropped the bag in. A leather boot rudely kicked the eject switch and the bag blew away out into space towards the direction of the exploding station. “Blast that will you. It’s got a targeting tracker in it.”

“Sure,” commented the Sith as his fingers closed on the trigger of the light lasers the ship carried. As the bag exploded he turned towards his master. “And what was that praytell? Getting rid of your stinky garbage master?”

“Insurance. It’s a bag of high end Collective weaponry and tech I scavenged when they invaded Orian. Well, was a bag anyhow. When the Principate comes to inspect this mess they are going to surely find the traces. It’s just enough to be tantalizing.” The robed man settled back into his seat, kicked up his feet, and crossed his arms. “Take us home, Macron. It’s going to be a few hours before we reach the fleet. I’m going to catch some shut-eye.”

THE END

