Hues of fire red and blazing orange engulfed the western skies over the city, chased from the east by the blacks, blues, and violets of impending dark. Pinprick lights of stars grew more numerous in the sky with each passing moment. Each light added more depth to the expansive patterns that would paint the tapestry of the night sky over the ever-restless souls of the city. The air at his back was beginning to pick up the chill of night, while his face soaked in the last moments of the warmth of day. He lowered himself to a seated position and fingers ran against the coarse stone dais. The sensation of the individual pieces of grit lingered in his fingers as he rested them in his lap.

The frequency of his nightly mediation ritual had been sporadic at best. The callings of business, both public and private, had kept the Sith from maintaining a clockwork regimen of practice. It was a simple procedure, that could be done anywhere, but in the fading light of the sunset he found it most easy to enter a state where the Force readily spoke to him. There was a slight chaos to the world at this time of day. Not the cacophony of midday, but a paced excitedness that underlie the being of every creature. It was the last moments of day, before the calm of night set in. These conditions were perfect for connecting to the web of energy upon which the galaxy moved.

The depths of his mind crept up from within, thought by thought, intrusively interrupting the growing stillness. Brief visualizations of past, present and future came and went as passersby on the streets below. Awareness, of all, of everything that was, is and yet would be crept over him. He could sense the birds fleeing on the wing back to their nests, the excitement of a group of revelers on the streets below as they prepared for a night on the town, the misery of a panhandler picking through the minimal stack of coins in his pot, and every measure of thought and feeling from the world below. He could sense them all and drank in their emotions; the violence of anger, the cruel sting of pain, the heart pounding rush of fear. An ancient voice, speaking without words filled his mind.

*Peace is a lie. There is only passion.*

The sensation was intoxicating. He remained in his seated posture, as the weight of the cloth of his robes fell away. The ends of the fine stitched material broke their bond with the sandstone dias upon which he sat. So too, his entire body lifted, held aloft in defiance of gravity. He could feel the coldness of the wind under him as he maintained a consciousness of all around him whilst simultaneously turning his focus inwards.

The darkness of his mind cascaded away and he found himself stood in a remote place, isolated from all he knew. The place was familiar in a way, though he did not yet remember it. Massive basalt stones, carved to impossible flatness, were underfoot. They met similarly hewn walls, angled in to form a trapezoidal corridor. Pillars held up a gilded ceiling, etched with a detailed relief that depicted some apparently ancient struggle. At the end of the hall before him, a raised portion of floor was host to a raised plinth. Bathed in oppressive white blue light, he could not see what was being presented to him. He was drawn to it. As he took a step forward, the massive dark stone flooring raised up monolithic pillars of stone.

*Through passion I gain strength.*

The stone blocks, held such weight they seemed impossible to move. He envisioned them raising at his command. They trembled slightly, but would not give heed to the order. He drew on the richness of feeling within him. Desire, curiosity, pride, defiance, and all other feelings that could be mustered. These elements, independently could be used as weaknesses, but together coalesced into the fuel which powered his ability to do what many would consider impossible. Again, his focus turned to the ash black stones. The first began to quake. It shuttered for a moment before it snapped back into its position in the floor. With each stone, he pressed forward, though each offered stiffer resistance. He dug deeper into the wellspring of emotion within him. He pulled from memories he’d never told a soul and their attendant emotions. He tapped into the wars of old and the deep hatred of his foes found within. He bathed in the anguish of defeat and the thrill of victory. As the fever swelled within him, the massive blocks eventually gave way. The corridor once again was unobstructed.

*Through strength I gain power.*

He glided into the antechamber the final room. As he crossed the threshold, the cobblestone floors ripped free of their solid placements and filled the entirety of the room with debris. The once solid floor became a chasm that seemed to suck the light of the room deep into its depths. The small chamber distorted, warping in place. He could feel his goal, the object obscured by the blinding light, get further away. What was once only a couple meters gap had grown to an impassibly wide void. He could feel the muscles in his face scrunch, his brow furrow, and his teeth grit. The space was too wide to leap, even aided by the will of the Dark Side. His mind raced with all possible permutations of plans and plots to reach the distant goal. Whispers in his ears, in ancient and rotten tongues, spoke of his failure. They growled at his inability; his ineptitude. With each passing moment, each branch of his plans terminating in failure, their voices grew. He opened his mouth to scream them silent, but each voice leapt inside his body drawn in on his breath. They roiled and rolled inside him. A great blackness enveloped him again. In the darkness he crushed, slashed, eviscerated each of the tormenting specters. In time, they were all silenced. The darkness faded and he found himself standing at the center of the room. The plinth, still enveloped in blinding light, was right before him. The chasm, the stones, the corridor, all were behind him.

*Through power I gain victory.*

His hand, bloodied and bruised reached into the beam of light. He knew the object, he could feel it, though not through the sensation of touch. It felt as though he had known it forever. As if the object were as much a part of him as his own hands. He coveted it. As his fingers fanned the periphery of the object, his reach halted at the end of a silvered chain. The chain snaked around his wrists, binding him and locking his body in position. He did not fight against them, he could not, he need not. A deep growl came from within him. It was like an echo of his own voice, slightly distorted and rich with an unspeakable vileness. The chains, polished and silvered, tarnished instantly. The polished shine browned and blued with decay. Each link crumbled, pouring onto the floor into millions of grains of sand. The sand fell from the edges of the raised island, each descended into the abyss below.

*Through victory my chains are broken.*

His hand grasped the mysterious article, instantly recognizing its curves and edges. It was not, to his surprise, something he’d held before. This was the thing he needed. It was old and new simultaneously. He felt complete at once, as if everything he’d ever planned was resolved. He could taste it on the tip of his tongue, saccharine sweet. It was the greatest taste he had ever known; pure freedom. He turned to see, the vast chasm that had opened before him had filled glassy black, blue and brown sand. He strode out of the chamber.

*The Force shall set me free.*

His eyes snapped open. He could feel the pull of the Force itself calling to him. He was being beckoned. His presence and only his presence could satisfy its demands. He was compelled instantly to leave. It was late. The sun had fully set. Night was upon him. Darkness was coming. He would make sure of it.

A terrible rain fell over the marshy world. Rivulets of water poured from cracks in the dark volcanic stone. Loose vines and epiphytes also found purchase in the cracked stone. Blue green leaves covered entire walls, their carpeting stalks and roots ripped open the foundations of the ancient building. Only the bright red flowers of the brave plants clinging to the protruding stones broke up the green creep of nature.

This place had once been a great bastion of the ancient Sith empires. So many of these places once existed, peppering the galaxy’s loci of power. This was but one, that had been lost to time, buried under a dogmatic genocidal crusade perpetuated by the Jedi.

True believers of their law could only imagine a galaxy at peace with the extermination of the architects of this once great fortress. For millennia, the Jedi marched on their crusade, rewriting the events of the past to place to vilify the Sith. Never once did the Jedi’s message reflect on the consequences of their actions. Instead, they sought only to rid the world of believers in a path different than theirs and hide the merits of their enemy’s philosophy and study in musty vaults, inaccessible to all. The Jedi locked away more truths about the universe than they were ever even aware of. Blindly, generations of their monk-warriors followed beliefs based on half-truths, ignorant to what possibilities were present in the untold. Now, what remained of the Jedi Order fell into two camps; The Reformed Jedi, those taught under Luke Skywalker, who had again been scattered to the stars, or those so orthodox in their beliefs even the Jedi of old would have expelled them from their ranks, who had been lurking in the most hidden corners of the galaxy.

It was one of the latter that brought him here. A band of puritanical witch hunters, that scoured systems accused of being touched by the Dark Side, amounting to little more than grave robbers, were targeting something in this place. Too small to catch the attention of the Inquisitorius, they posed little threat to Dark Jedi Brotherhood at large. They lacked the resources of the Collective or the other numerous enemies of the Brotherhood. They were a splinter cell. Their mission was simple, to purge the Galaxy of the knowledge of the Dark Side.

It was here, among the ribbons of once mighty empires that he sought a to save shard of truth. It had been hidden away, sequestered in a damp, dark world. Ignorance to the true nature of this place, the true nature of the Dark Side, had put this location firmly under the noses of the Jedi and they were unable to catch its scent underlying the foul stench of their own lies. With their temple vaults ransacked, and the secrets within stolen or stored in the lost vaults of Emperor Palpatine, directions to places like this could only be born from the will of the Force itself. Thran had seen this place in his dreams. It haunted his meditations. What was contained within the shards of these hallowed halls had been targeted for cleansing by the Creed of Echoes. They too had been visitors in the visions he’d had. He had seen their faces.

A voice had called to him in the night, seeping slowly into all aspects of his mind. It was a voice that spoke no words, from before time itself. He’d heard it before, when he was a child. Thran remembered calling out to the nothingness and he remembered the deep, guttural chant it sang in reply. It was one and the same, but this time, it was the Force itself that was calling out for him. He had to answer the call. He had told no one where he was going, partly because he was unsure himself. He listened on the echoes of the Force, for the wailing call, following it. It drew him in. The Force was calling him and he must listen.

He had stolen a vessel on Seraph, ditched it on Sanar VI, boarded a cargo hauler to Frental, using only his soul as his compass from there. Ten or twelve exchanges later, anyone who would have been on his tail would have been lost. The familiar wordless voice was loud now, as if it were shouting in his ears. Thran could feel the sorrow in this place, the emptiness of the halls which once had celebrated great Sith victories. His eyes darted across the bas-reliefs of ancient depictions of long dead warriors, whose likenesses had been weathered beyond recognition. While their names had been consumed by the fires of times eons before, these smoothed over carvings still told tale of their deeds.

He knew this place, deep in his soul. He had been here before. It felt no different to him than his penthouse suite in Tokare. It felt as if he belonged there. His eyes, obscured by a heavy hooded cloak, were not providing him vision of the complex stonework. He was seeing this place now as if from the depths of his memory. He knew every stone, as if they were his peers and kin.

He snaked his way through the twists and turns of the corridors, feeling the dampness of the cold stone beneath his feet. His journey brought him to a corridor, with trapezoidal walls, flaking gilded ceilings with detailed carvings of more nameless figures. The patchwork stones that had made up the path which led him here gave way to gigantic weathered monolithic stones. His raised his eyes to the end of the corridor. It was a small room. A shaft of diffused light radiated down from an unseen place above, illuminating a plinth, overgrown with moss. Croaking of marsh frogs and the pattering of falling rain were the only sounds he could hear.

He could make out what sat atop it. An urn, with vicious angular facets. The Sith could feel the pull of the vessel. It beckoned him with the gravitational strength of a blackhole. He neither could nor would turn back. His foot cleared the threshold of the corridor, landing firmly on the massive stone slab before him.

“Peace is a lie. There is only passion.” He said, striding fully into the corridor. “Through passion I gain strength. Through strength I gain power. Through power I gain victory. Through victory, my chains are broken. The Force shall set me free.”

He traversed the corridor steadily. The stones below him held firm, as if they bowed in respect of his mastery of the Sith Code. He stepped onto the dais, its grainy stone gripped at his boots firmly. Thran extended his hand, running it over the urn before him.

“Through passion I gain strength. Through strength I gain power. Through power I gain victory. Through victory, my chains are broken. The Force shall set me free.” He recited.

A whisper on the wind filled his ears.

*Defeat them. Free me.*

Footsteps echoed behind him. The Dark Side of the Force swelled, radiating from the prize before him.

The Jedi entered the room, drawing their unignited lightsabers up in defensive postures. Master Shula Broca stood closest to the cloaked figure, his brow dripped with sweat and his eyes darted back and forth. The Lutrillian wiped away the perspiration from his broad face with the ivory-colored sleeve of his robes. The High Paragons of the Creed had warned them that great evil lurked in places such as these. In the vaults of the ancient Sith tyrants they were sure to find beasts of all measure, perverted by infecting tendrils of the dark energies that pooled here.

Illusions, so complex that they felt real, also swirled in the darkened eddies of the flow of the Living Force. They could corrupt the mind, filling it with lashes and tethers of deceit. The Jedi struggled to remain calm. Fear began to mass in his gut. He appealed to the Force to rid his eyes of the clouds of deceit and to show him that the figure was another illusion. He swallowed hard with the realization that the man stood before them was made of the same flesh as he and his apprentice. His tall ears twitched.

“Follow my lead, Miranna.” He said soft. “Trust in the Force. We will purge this evil here and now.”

As he spoke, the figure lifted the black hood from his head. The heavy cloth cloak slipped off his shoulders, revealing a lithe pallid form of a man. His skin, greyed like that of a corpse, was marked with tattoos. Emblazoned across his broad shoulders was a mosaic pattern, radiating from a central point. The abstraction of a setting sun was as ominous as it was intricate.

The Sith tilted his head slightly and the crack of bones echoed through the chamber. As if conjured from nothingness, a lightsaber appeared in his hand. The dulled metal had been polished in places, a sign the weapon was well used. The throat of the emitter section had been bound in deep red scaled leather, likely a trophy from the Sith’s trials. The blade erupted, spewing its flame-colored blade within millimeters of the damp black stone. Miranna, the mousey young woman, flinched. The lightsaber roared, letting out a particularly shrill wail when it ignited. The man began to turn, holding his burning blade perfectly still. An arc of small clouds of steam appeared, where the heat of the weapon boiled the collected water on the dais before him.

The Sith had a paralyzing beauty about him. He was not misshapen, ugly, or mutated. The Jedi were surprised. They had known of the corrupting nature of the Dark Side and had been taught that in the quest for power, the Sith would conduct horrifying rituals to augment their appearance in a matter that was fit for their evil path.

“Master! We must help this man before he is taken by the Darkness and turned into a Sith monster!” Miranna Nel exclaimed, slightly lowering her guard.

The ruddy skinned Lutrillian narrowed his wide set eyes. His mind raced. The Sith were supposed to be corrupted by evil, physically distorted by the ugliness of the Dark Side. This must be impossible. A Sith’s soul could not be saved. Their only salvation was found in being purged. He beseeched the Living Force to give him guidance. His heart skipped a beat. The path of light that he walked had become obscured to his mind.

A sickening yellowness in the Sith’s eyes confirmed his suspicions. This was no acolyte of evil, no mere foot soldier in the armies of shadow. They were face to face with a true tyrant of pure wickedness and malice. The Sith had not fallen to darkness, he was constructed of it. Clouds of abhorrent energy emanated from him, strangling out the last beams of light in the Jedi’s heart. He was a bringer of darkness, of evil, of suffering.

“The light has abandoned you, Master Jedi. There is only Darkness here...Darkness...and monsters.” The Sith hissed, with an unnatural harmonic tone reverberating below his spoken words.

The furred Master tightened his grip on his lightsaber, igniting the deep blue blade. He drew the lightsaber up to his right, firmly clutched in his paws. With both hands gripping the weapon, his breathing rapidly built as he searched for his connection to his faith. It was as if he had been ripped from the Living Force itself. It was disorienting. He felt heavy, sluggish, and tired.

“No, Miranna. He is beyond our aid. Prepare yourself. Believe not its lies.” The whiskered Master said.

The padawan followed her master’s lead, depressing the activator on her own lightsaber. The green blade leapt to life, gasping its first breath with a hissing snap. She extended her left palm forward, raising her blade over her head in a well-practiced defensive stance. Her eyes drifted towards the stalking monster, locking eyes with him for just an instant.

Her mind shook as if her inner peace itself had been struck with a cudgel, shattering it ten thousand slivers and shards. A blind dread twisted in her gut, she nearly doubled over. She felt as if she were shrinking with each vision snapping through her mind. She could see feel her master’s suffering and pain, before the Sith ran him through with his lightsaber. The heat of a fire in her home at the Hermitage burned her face and eyes, as her ears filled with the discordant screams of her friends and fellow believers. The flash of her reflection in a pool of black water, distorted and scarred. The brightness of her eyes abandoned for the heinous yellow of the eyes that she had just dared peer into. She remembered her training and shook herself free of the illusion, but the nagging memory of the images remained.

The Sith were vicious and bloodthirsty, she thought. He would strike at again second. He did. The scalding orange of his blade jabbed at the Master, who met the test with a lateral parry. The furred swordman steadied his guard, preparing for another lunging attack. The thick built Lutrillian began to sidestep, hoping that if he could place the Sith between the two of them, they could overwhelm him. The Sith grinned.

His hand jutted forward, clasping an unseen grip around the throat of the learner. Her feet kicked as she was lifted from the ground. She choked and gargled as she struggled for breath. The Jedi Master catapulted into action, swinging his azure lightsaber in a wide sweeping strike. The blade was met instantly by the Sith’s, instantly weaving beneath the powerful strike and redirecting it downwards.

The initial offensive was not coordinated or powerful enough to shake loose his mystic grasp on his padawan. The worshiper of the light found his footing again, lifting the blade above his head and striking downwards. The Sith seemed unfazed by the strike, casually sidestepping before the strike could find purchase. The fire red blade of the Sith rolled the blade over, he drew it quickly over his face before aiming the point back at the lumbering Jedi’s center of mass. The demon-esque man barely seemed to move as the thrust singed a point on the loose linen of the Jedi’s robes. The split upper

lip of the Lutrillian parted as he pivoted back and to the right. The Jedi spun free of the Sith, opening up a gap between them.

With as much effort as discarding a used paper cup into a trash compactor, the Sith cast aside the still squirming padawan. She careened into the angular structural support holding the chamber’s ceiling aloft. The apprentice crumpled into a pile on the dirty wet stone. She coughed and gasped for air, praying to once again fill her lungs.

The Sith’s hate filled eyes never broke from the Master. The Sith snarled, goading the alien Jedi extremist into trying another ill-fated attack. It worked. The Jedi charged, drawing his lightsaber down from left to right. Masterfully, the Sith guided the Jedi’s strike wide of target. The inferno hues of his lightsaber slid up the blue blade, aiming another simple testing thrust at the Jedi’s heart. The hirsute Jedi furiously struck back, cutting upwards and across the Sith’s body. The duelist’s feet remained planted, but his upper body rotated free of the reckless cut’s trajectory.

Miranna propped herself up, twisting the soles of her boots into the rough stone to get maximum grip. The launched herself forward, like a torpedo aimed directly at the Sith. She was met instantly by a swift cutting strike backwards. She parried the strike. She was well practiced in the defensive form she adopted and knew that the Sith’s bloodlust would make her a target long enough for her Master’s more powerful offensive technique more effective. Together the servants of the light could defeat any evil; or so she thought.

The Sith belayed her confidence with a flurry of meticulous prodding strikes, alternating between the girl and the seasoned master with ease. Not once did he overextend. His form was flawless. He was testing their defenses. Somehow, amid all the shuffling, the Sith managed to keep his side facing both opponents. The stance, while simple, created the smallest possible target for them to strike. She was comfortable on the defense, but the enrapturing creature had quickly picked up on that. For every two strikes the apprentice countered, her master had countered five. She realized that in an instant, the Sith had calculated their preferred style and was instantly employing tactics to negate their strength. The defensive form she practiced lacked the precise attacks necessary to match the duelist, by forcing her on the offense he was instantly weakening her position. Likewise, by pressing attacks against her master’s more simple and direct style, he could more easily find the hole that would deliver the killing blow. Miranna held fast in her defense, as she circled around to meet her master’s side. If the pair of them attacked from one direction, it might be possible for the Jedi to shatter his control of the duel.

Shula Broca nodded to his padawan learner. She had done well to assess the tactical position of the duel. The Sith stood snarling in his guard, waiting for them to coordinate their strikes. They did not strike. They waited for him to attack. He obliged.

His form morphed, from the disciplined dissecting pokes and prods of the duelist’s form to a vicious and unhinged barrage of wide swipes. Every strike came from a different direction, smoothly chained aggressive swipes put them on their heels. He was relentless. His feet never moved backwards. He marched upon them, burying them under his onslaught. They were backed into the corridor through which they had entered. The Student and Master took turns, peering back at the masses of barked vine trunks erupting from the cracks in the stone and plotting a retreat around them.

Left, Low, right, high. The Jedi fumbled their defense against the steadfast march of the Sith’s pursuit. The corridor opened eventually, into a muddy courtyard with islands of fallen stone among the puddles. Miranna felt her feet sink into the mud as she struggled to maintain her defense. She hurled a frustrated lunge at the Sith. His roaring blade kissed hers, directing the blow towards the slippery mud. The back of the Sith’s hand struck her firmly in the head. Her eyes went dark for a moment as she was cast several meters away. Her head bounced off one of the dark stones, fallen from the parapets high above the forgotten garden. A trail of blood began to seep through the streak of dark earth smeared across her face. She felt dizzy. Her vision settled on the aberrant Sith, who bore down on her master. She leaned against the meter wide stone, hoping that it’s weight would help her restore balance.

The furred jowls of the Jedi squeezed tight as he gritted his teeth with each continued defense of the Sith’s aggression. His blue lightsaber swiped towards the Sith, it was met instantly with his foul blade. The Masters momentum of his staggering strength was preserved as the hooked under the cerulean beam. As readily as he had defended against the strike, he changed its path. The spin induced by the redirection tore the blade free of the canid Jedi’s hammer grip. The blade flew meters beyond his reach. His arm extended out, beckoning the weapon to return.

“I told you... Jedi. The Light has abandoned you.” The Sith spat.

The Sith pointed his boney fingers at the master, directing crackling bolts of dreadful dark energy towards him. The electric crackle of the energy tore the relative stillness of the open air to ribbons. The Master howled and jerked as the arcing power seized control of his muscles. He crumpled into a pile in the mud. The Sith turned to the apprentice, extending his hand towards her.

Again, she flinched. She was expecting the heinous spell to be directed at her. She felt the massive weight of the stone she was propped against shift. The massive block of volcanic basalt rose from the filth it rested in. Globs of mud sloughed from the massive stone, rejoining the slurry on the ground beneath it. With the flick of his wrist, the Sith slingshotted the massive piece of masonry towards her incapacitated master. The weight of the block would crush him flat.

“NO!” She screamed, rocketing both of her hands forward to upset the trajectory of the stone.

The blast was just strong enough to alter its course away from Master Brocu. The stone smashed into the wall, blasting a hole in the already crumbling façade. The Sith’s attention snapped towards her. His hand flipped over, as his fingers balled into a fist. Tightness formed around her throat again, as she was lifted towards the heavens. Cold drops of rain struck her face. She prayed for deliverance.

As easily as the Sith had summoned the massive stone block, she was airborne. She careened directly at him, his fist outstretched towards her. Her face impacted his fist and her travel was stopped dead. Miranna could no longer see from her left eye. She could feel the free-floating chunks of bone stabbing behind her eye. She let out a sorrowful wail. She again prayed for deliverance.

She felt weightless again, opening her right eye for just long enough to see the broken stone walls closing quickly. Her shoulder hit the wall first, causing her neck to whip forward. Her face crashed against the wall and everything faded to black.

“MIRANNA!” came the coughing voice of Shula Broku.

“Her suffering will not end until long after yours has, Master Jedi.” With venom in his words the Sith replied.

“You...You cannot defeat the Light, Monster!” the Jedi stammered.

“She will beg me to end her life before I am through. And she will see that the Light has truly abandoned her. And when she is broken and alone, she will see...the truth.” The Sith said.

Flashes of the torture the young student would face tore through the Master’s mind. A pain so deep it stung every sense. The master could taste the iron of blood in his mouth, mixing with the salt of tears. He could feel his apprentice’s faith collapsing.

“You know nothing of truth, Sith!” he said, roaring.

“Everything I have said is true, Master Jedi. There is no light here. It has abandoned you. You will tell me the location of your kind, you will give me all of their secrets and I will be merciful and end your torment.” The Sith said.

“I will tell you nothing!” the Jedi said baring his teeth.

The Sith narrowed his sickly yellow eyes. The Lutrillian doubled over, screaming as if he were being eaten alive. The Sith could be a surgeon when it came to retrieving information from his prey, but he took special joy in the savage butchery he was conducting within the Jedi’s mind. He ripped the desired information from the Jedi mind, tearing chunks out with it. The monk was reduced to a blubbering mess. The Sith flitted his fingers and the muddy lightsaber of the Jedi master came to his hand. He wiped the mud on the Jedi’s robes before tucking it away in his belt.

Miranna climbed out of the rubble, she clutched her side. She was injured badly. She tripped as she raised her lightsaber, dragging herself to the defense of her master. She watched the Sith stand over him as he wept tears of agony. The Sith raised his hand and the limp body of the Master was raised before him.

“Say it...Master Jedi...Tell her the truth.” The Sith goaded.

The Jedi Master looked to his apprentice, tears falling from his wideset eyes. They ran down his wide split lip, dripping down to mix with the rain in the mud below. He would try to resist one last time, but the Master knew that his end was upon him. He tried to shutter the windows of his mind, but the Sith blew them in like a cyclone. He could feel the evil oil of his voice coursing through his deepest thoughts. He shook for a moment. He could not resist the Sith’s command.

“Peace...is...a...lie.” the Jedi coughed.

The Apprentice watched as the firey blade of the Sith slowly pierced the master’s heart. She watched the life fade from his eyes as his body went limp. He collapsed into the muck, landing face first, eyes open wide and mouth agape.

“NOOOOO!!!” the apprentice screamed.

She felt a spark deep within her, burning and seething. It was a feeling that she had never known. It roiled and brought her vision to a single point. She screamed at the Sith, bubbles of spit and blood pouring from the corners of her mouth. Rage.

She moved with a ferocity she had never known before. She hurtled towards the Sith, swinging her verdant bladed weapon at him. She pressed a constant attack against him. He was forced on his heels under the weight and number of her strikes. With each swing she roared. The blademaster was backed into the corridor. She charged relentlessly. She backed him through the threshold of the room in which she had first seen him. In that moment she realized, she had played into his hand. Her hatred for him was the purest thing she had ever felt in her life.

“Peace is a lie. There is only passion.” He said, smiling.

As the last word escaped his lips, the massive stone blocks in the corridor lifted. The room was shut to the rest of the world. Her functioning eye widened. The Sith gestured with his hand again, lifting her from terra firma. His lightsaber deactivated and was silent. She was pressed against the wall. Her breath shortened as he closed on her. His hand reached into the sash around his waist. When it appeared again it was clutching a wicked blade, golden and stained by blood. She screamed as she felt the razor-sharp dagger pierce her heart. She tried to claw at the Sith’s face, but she could find no strength. She looked down to see blood being siphoned into the maelstrom within the gem on the vessel’s pommel. She looked up again to see the bare walls of the chamber lit up with burning red symbols. She gasped and the last hint of light left her eyes.

As the blood red symbols darkened in color, the column of light illuminating the pedestal in the middle of the chamber vanished. The sharp-edged urn creaked and the lid peeled back with a hiss. The Sith turned his gaze back to his prize. Streaks of green began to seep back into his sickened eyes and the pallor of his flesh faded. He grinned as the dead Jedi fell to the floor. The ritual had been completed exactly as he had foreseen. The Sith gathered his trophy, adding the second Jedi’s lightsaber to his prize list.

He peered into the urn. His hand followed. His fingers wrapped around the relic. An ancient voice filled his mind.

*Freedom.*