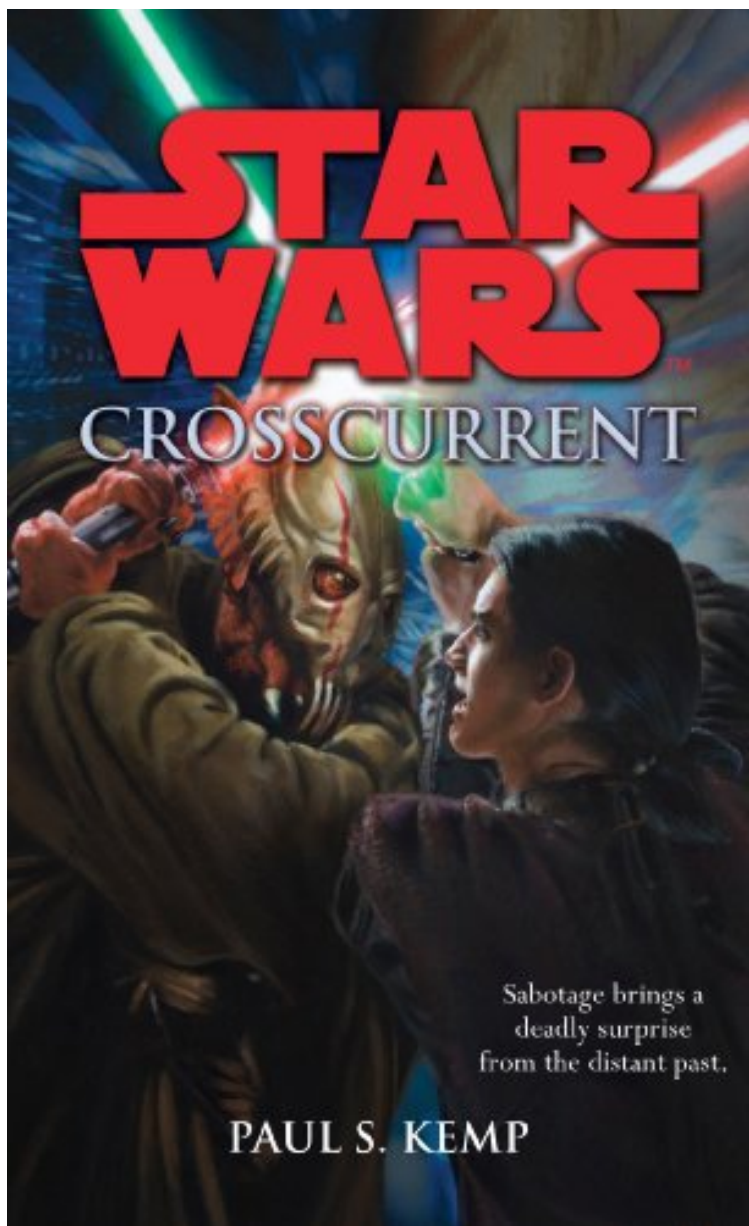


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Star Wars: Crosscurrent



Par Paul S. Kemp
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThousands of years before the Legacy of the Force series, two Sith ships were sabotaged, resulting in the crash of one on a distant, isolated planet, and the loss of the other in a hyperspace anomaly. The survivors of the crashed ship evolved into the Lost Tribe of Sith introduced in our new Fate of the Jedi series. But the other ship was lost in a kind of time warp, finally exiting hyperspace far, far in the future--the time of the Legacy of the Force series, a very different galaxy from the one they left behind in what seems to be almost no time at all. Now Jedi Knight Jaden Korr--who will be introduced as a new Star

Wars character in Fate of the Jedi: Abyss--must find a way to prevent these time-traveling Sith from asserting their horrific ambitions over a galaxy already reeling from the depredations of the control-hungry Jacen Solo.

Chapter One The Past: 5,000 years before the Battle of Yavin The crust of Phaegon III's largest moon burned, buckled, and crumbled under the onslaught. Sixty-four specially equipped cruisers little more than planetary-bombardment weapons systems with a bit of starship wrapped around them flew in a suborbital, longitudinal formation. The sleek silver cruisers, their underbellies aglow in reflected destruction, struck Saes as unexpectedly beautiful. How strange that they could unleash annihilation in such warm, glorious colors. Plasma beams shrieked from the bow of each cruiser and slammed into the arboreal surface of the moon, shimmering green umbilicals that wrote words of ruin across the surface and saturated the world in fire and pain. Dust and a swirl of thick black smoke churned in the atmosphere as the cruisers methodically vaporized large swaths of the moon's surface. The bright light and black smoke of destruction filled Harbingers' viewscreen, drowning out the orange light of the system's star. Except for the occasional beep of a droid or a murmured word, the bridge crew sat in silence, their eyes fixed alternately on their instruments and the viewscreen. Background chatter on the many comm channels droned over the various speakers, a serene counterpoint to the chaos of the moon's death. Saes's keen olfactory sense caught a whiff of his human crew's sweat, spiced with the tang of adrenaline. Watching the cruisers work, watching the moon die, Saes was reminded of the daelfruits he'd enjoyed in his youth. He had spent many afternoons under the sun of his homeworld, peeling away the daelfruit's coarse, brown rind to get at the core of sweet, pale flesh. Now he was peeling not a fruit but an entire moon. The flesh under the rind of the moon's crust—the Lignan—they were mining would ensure a Sith victory in the battle for Kirrek and improve Saes's place in the Sith hierarchy. He would not challenge Shar Dakhon immediately, of course. He was still too new to the Sith Order for that. But he would not wait overlong. Evil roots in unbridled ambition, Relin had told him once. Saes smiled. What a fool his onetime Master had been. Naga Sadow rewarded ambition. Status? he queried his science droid, 8K6. The fires in the viewscreen danced on the anthropomorphic droid's reflective silver surface as it turned from its instrument console to address him. Thirty-seven percent of the moon's crust is destroyed. Wirelessly connected to the console's readout, the droid did not need to glance back for an update on the information as the cruisers continued their work. Thirty-eight percent. Thirty-nine. Saes nodded, turned his attention back to the viewscreen. The droid fell silent. Despite Harbingers' distance from the surface, the Force carried back to Saes the terror of the pre-sentient primates that populated the moon's surface. Saes imagined the small creatures fleeing through the trees, screeching, relentlessly pursued by, and inevitably consumed in, fire. They numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Their fear caressed his mind, as faint, fleeting, and pleasing as morning fog. His fellow Sith on Harbinger and Omen would be feeling the same thing as the genocide progressed to its inexorable conclusion. Perhaps even the Massassi aboard each ship would, in their dim way, perceive the ripples in the Force. Long ago, when Saes had been a Jedi, before he had come to understand the dark side, such wholesale destruction of life might have struck him as wrong. He knew better now. There was no absolute right and wrong. There was only power. And those who wielded it defined right and wrong for themselves. That realization was the freedom offered by the dark side and the reason the Jedi would fall, first at Kirrek, then at Coruscant, then all over the galaxy. Temperature in the wake? he asked. The science droid consulted the sensor data on its compscreen. Within the tolerance of the harvester droids. Saes watched the cruisers slide through the atmosphere and light the moon on fire. He turned in his command chair to face his second in command, Los Dor. Dor's mottled, deep red skin looked nearly black in the dim light of the bridge. His yellow eyes mirrored the moon's fires. He never seemed to look up into Saes's eyes, instead focusing his gaze on the twin horns that jutted from the sides of Saes's jaw. Saes knew Dor was as much a spy for Naga Sadow as he was an ostensible aide to himself. Among other things, Dor was there to ensure that Saes returned the Lignan all of the Lignan to Sadow's forces at Primus Goluud. The tentacles on Dor's face quivered, and the cartilaginous ridges over his eyes rose in a question. Give the order to launch the harvester droids, Colonel, Saes said to him. Harbingers and Omens. Yes, Captain, Dor responded. He turned to his console and transmitted the order to both ships. The honorific Captain still struck Saes's hearing oddly. He was accustomed to leading hunting parties as a First, not ships as a Captain. In moments hundreds of cylindrical pods streaked out of Harbingers' launching bay, and hundreds more flew from her sister ship, Omen, all of them streaking across the viewscreen. They hit the atmosphere and spat lines of fire as they descended. The sight reminded Saes of a pyrotechnic display. Harvester droids away, 8K6 intoned. Stay with the droids and magnify, Saes said. Copy, answered Dor, and nodded at the young human helmsman who controlled the viewscreen. The harvester droids

trajectories placed them tens of kilometers behind the destruction wrought by the mining cruisers. Most of them were lost to sight in the smoke, but the helmsman kept the viewscreens perspective on a dozen or so that descended through a clear spot in the sky. Attrition among the droids upon entry is negligible, said 8K6. Point zero three percent. The helmsman further magnified the viewscreen again, then again. Five kilos above the surface, the droids arrested their descent with thrusters, unfolded into their insectoid forms, and gently dropped to the charred, superheated surface. Anti-grav servos and platform pads on their six legs allowed them to walk on the smoking ruin without harm. Give me a view from one of the droids. Copy, sir, said Dor. The helm worked his console, and half the viewscreen changed to a perspective of a droids-eye view of the moon. A murmur ran through the bridge crew, an exhalation of awe. Even 8K6 looked up from the instrumentation. The voice of Captain Korsin, commander of Harbingers sister ship, Omen, broke through the comm chatter and boomed over the bridge speakers. That is a sight. It is, Saes answered. Smoke rose in wisps from the exposed subcrust. The heat of the plasma beams had turned the charred surface as hard and brittle as glass. Thick cracks and chasms lined the subcrust, veins through which only smoke and ash flowed. Waves of heat rose from the surface, distorting visibility and giving the moon an otherworldly, dream-like feel. Hundreds of harvester droids dotted the surface, metal flies clinging to the moons seared corpse. Walking in their awkward, insectoid manner, they arranged themselves into orderly rows, their high-pitched droidspeak mere chatter in the background. Sensors activating, intoned 8K6. As one, long metal proboscises extended from each of the droids faces. They ambled along in the wake of the destruction, waving their proboscises over the surface like dowsing rods, fishing the subsurface for the telltale molecular signature of Lignan. Thinking of the Lignan, Saes licked his lips, tasted a faint flavor of phosphorous. He had handled a small Lignan crystal years before and still remembered the charge he had felt while holding it. His connection with that crystal had been the first sign of his affinity for the dark side. The unusual molecular structure of Lignan attuned it to the dark side and enhanced a Siths power when using the Force. The Sith had not been able to locate any significant deposits of the crystals in recent decades until now, until just before the battle for Kirrek. And it was Saes who had done it. A few standard months ago, Naga Sadow had charged Saes with locating some deposits of the rare crystal for use in the war. It was a test, Saes knew. And Los Dor, his ostensible aide, was grading him. The Force had given Saes his answer, had brought him eventually, and at the last possible moment before the conflict began, to Phaegon III. The Force had used him as a tool to ensure Sith victory. The realization warmed him. His scaled skin creaked as he adjusted his weight in his chair. He would harvest enough Lignan from Phaegon IIIs moon to equip almost every Sith Lord and Massassi warrior preparing for the assault on Kirrek. If hed had more time, he could have mined the moon in a more methodical, less destructive fashion. But he did not have time, and Sadow would not tolerate delay. So Saes had created his own right and wrong, and the primates and other life-forms on Phaegon IIIs moon had died for it. He tapped his forefinger on his lightsaber hilt its curved form reminiscent of a claw impatient to see the results of the droids sensor scans. He leaned forward in his chair when an excited beep announced the first discovery of a Lignan signature. Another joined it. Another. He shared a look with Dor and could not tell from the fix of Dors mouth, partially masked as it was by a beard of tentacles, if his colonel was pleased or displeased. There it is, Saes, said Korsin from Omen. Weve done it. Presentation de l'diteur Thousands of years before the Legacy of the Force series, two Sith ships were sabotaged, resulting in the crash of one on a distant, isolated planet, and the loss of the other in a hyperspace anomaly. The survivors of the crashed ship evolved into the Lost Tribe of Sith introduced in our new Fate of the Jedi series. But the other ship was lost in a kind of time warp, finally exiting hyperspace far, far in the future--the time of the Legacy of the Force series, a very different galaxy from the one they left behind in what seems to be almost no time at all. Now Jedi Knight Jaden Korr--who will be introduced as a new Star Wars character in Fate of the Jedi: Abyss--must find a way to prevent these time-traveling Sith from asserting their horrific ambitions over a galaxy already reeling from the depredations of the control-hungry Jacen Solo.