

“Everyone gets a ticket,” the little clerk said. “No exceptions! It’s procedure.”

Brian had lingered at the foot of the stairs, and he watched as Qui Jen’s expression changed from a frustrated scowl to a slight grin. She turned and moved toward the clerk’s window with quickening steps. She drew her sword as she approached. She reached inside the small opening in the window and grasped the collar and tie of the little man. She yanked him forward through the glass, shattering it as he tumbled through the opening onto the floor.

The little man had only recovered enough to be on one knee huddled and cowering when Qui Jen’s katana blade came slicing down, slitting the man open with an explosion of light and a puff of smoke.

The thick smoke quickly cleared, revealing a charred broken globe about two feet wide. It looked rather like a hatched egg that was blackened and charred on the edges.

“He was a Klippot,” Brian said as he stepped forward and Qui Jen slowly rose from the crouched pose of her finishing stroke.

“That’s right!” Hadji said, snapping his fingers. “The Klippot of Geburah is bureaucracy, procedure just for the sake of procedure.”

Qui Jen was standing over the still-smoking globe, blade in hand. She kicked the globe, launching it into the doors, which exploded outward in a pulse of energy, shattering the glass. The shards flickered like tumbling snowflakes as they floated to the ground.

Everyone impulsively drew their swords and quickly advanced to where the doors had been to see that they were standing at the edge of a cliff. They could see the remains of the Klippot shell fall away into the dark cloud that filled the canyon before them. They knew that they were standing on the edge of the abyss.