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Mindspark

Book Three of the Zaddack
Tales

Also by Karen Daniels

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Mindspark

book three of the Zaddack Tales

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Mindspark

a novel

by **Karen Daniels**

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10th Anniversary Special Mindspark Release

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*This 10th Anniversary Release of Mindspark
is dedicated to my children, Kaley, Quinn and Devin*

Thank You
to all the voices within and without

Prologue

Before the beginning of time as we know it, there was a cosmic seed of both Light and Dark. This helix heated slowly over time until the energy reached a critical level; there was a titanic explosion and Dark was hurled from Light.

Time passed and the hotness cooled. A star was born, then many, until the firmament contained countless points of brightness. Planets were forged from fiery births and as the cosmic clock ticked on, some worlds became temperate with livable climates. Life began.

But the Dark, alone and contracted into its own linked dimensions, hungered mindlessly, yearning to return to the point of origin, to rejoin Light.

Millennia of millennia passed and creation's Dark began to undulate. Finally it spilled forth, abandoning its void from beyond beyond. The Dark surged through space, in and out of dimensions, searching to reconnect with Light. Unstoppable, this ultimate Dark migrated, swallowing planets and stars, and all life that dared to stand in its path.

The chill in the early morning air was arctic. Terru snorted, sending up plumes of thick white vapor. Cold cut through his furry coat and wrapped around his bones with an ache that burned. The zaddack shivered. Not a skin shiver, but a deep muscle spasm as his body struggled to warm itself.

Automatically he pulled his head closer until it appeared to emerge from between the humps of his shoulder blades. The membrane designed to keep sand grit out of his eyes closed against the torrid cold but still his eyes watered. His breathing was labored, a struggle to bring in such iciness and warm it for his body's use. His usually proud tail was limp and the scruff of his neck puffed against his chest.

The edge of Darkness was upon them.

A falling star dropped in arcing descent, splatting in the sand with sprays of fire. The sparks, forged from the dust of creation, stuck to the zaddack's fur and the energy filled him with foresight. Even as his body froze his feet burned, melting beneath him.

Death was stalking the universe and anything containing mindspark, the energy of life, was prey. As the sky fell around him Terru woke with a jerk.

Ryn, the female zaddack, growled, startled by Terru's movement. She butted her head against her mate, stretched, splaying her paws before settling in again against the warmth of his belly.

Terru's golden eyes glittered in the darkness of normal night. He remained awake as a false dawn tickled the horizon. He squinted and looked up to watch for falling stars.

One

Jaspen's hood fell low over his face, trapping the luminescence that shone from his eyes. He moved through the ship's corridors while the other two-leggeds slept, his soft-booted steps silent. When he neared the viewing port he paused and pushed the hood from his forehead. To his vulnerable eyes the distant stars shone with a painful radiance; yet, he was grateful, for it meant that the fatal Darkness was still far away. He averted his gaze from the endless pattern of space and an afterimage of searing spots danced across his vision.

The oreseeker pulled his hood forward and stood in silence. He closed his eyes and sent his senses outward, spindles of his essence reaching from the core of his mindspark out into the universe. He touched deep emotional pain and a raw stab of anger but knew these to be clinging energy from his own self. He sucked in a deep breath and continued his search. The effort made his bones ache. He could sense the Dark thing out there; moving, growing, disappearing and reappearing, stretching ever nearer; still he could not touch it.

Jaspen opened his eyes and sighed, a release from deep within his belly. He turned from the viewing port and moved on. Though his body had aged little, he had walked past this port almost daily for the last fifty-four years. And for the last eleven his heart had been trapped, bound in a prison of pain. The glow from his eyes illuminated the ship's slick gray walls; a sheen as familiar and detestable to him as his loneliness.

He walked down the steps leading to the

zaddacks' lair just outside the crysolium chamber. Jaspen's footsteps alerted the male zaddack, Terru, who raised his head and blinked sleep-filled golden eyes from where he lay snuggled against his mate. The two zaddacks were twined around each other and the comforting sound of the female's quiet snoring went on uninterrupted.

Jaspen traveled smoothly along the flooring, his hooded-cloak billowing at his heels. He kneeled and reached a pale-skinned hand to gently stroke the bristled-fur on top of Terru's head. The male zaddack yawned. In the luminescence from Jaspen's eyes the zaddack's jagged teeth glimmered, like bone-forged knives in moonlight. Terru's fur felt familiar against the oreseeker's fingers, though Jaspen knew if there had been others around Terru would not have submitted to this touch; it was not the zaddack way. But every twenty-seven hours when the lights went off to simulate night, Jaspen roamed freely, coming here, and always paying homage to the zaddacks. And they allowed it for the time of night belonged to Jaspen.

Ryn slept on as the oreseeker fondled Terru's rough fur. The warmth from the zaddacks rose to greet Jaspen like heat from fire in a chilly cave. He smiled at how well the zaddacks fit together, the female's delicate paws and Terru's larger versions; the shadowed outlines of brindled markings on their furred-skin blending together. Jaspen sighed, a sound full of yearning to belong to another, as these two did to each other. Unable to resist, Jaspen eased his body down to lay next to the zaddacks. He shut his glowing eyes and listened to the slow rhythmic breathing of Ryn, feeling the twitch of her paws as she dreamt of some far off thing. He could sense her essence as a rich jumble of color inside his head.

Terru exhaled deeply, a sound of contentment, which made Jaspen's heart contract. The male zaddack lowered his head and rested his muzzle on Jaspen's shoulder. The oreseeker timed his breathing with Terru's and he imagined what it was like to travel on four paws instead of two feet. While Jaspen lay there, he belonged.

Jaspen had no idea how much later it was when he woke. The ship remained dark and the zaddacks still slept. Reluctantly he pulled away from the shimmering warmth. Terru opened one eye, blinked, then closed it again.

Jaspen stood and the chill of the outer crysolium chamber penetrated his cloak. He pulled the garment tighter and moved to the inner wall. He entered his code, pressed the opening mechanism, and pushed the solid weight of the door open. After moving into the crysolium chamber he shut the door. A familiar sense enveloped him. There was no one else here, but he was not alone.

A lump of crysolium sat in the center of the circular chamber; a large piece of ore by some standards in the universe—small by others. Jaspen shoved back his hood and the light from his eyes sprang forward in the darkness. With his unique vision he could see that the c-ore pulsed with life; mentor's mindspark lay within.

Jaspen moved close to the ore and dared to touch it. Then he stepped back a pace and sat down while pulling a medallion from the pocket of his cloak. Shaped with two concentric circles, the pendant called Spiriteye generated warmth in his palm as the metal responded to the close proximity of

mentor's life force within the crysolium.

The oreseeker raised the Spiriteye to his eyes and peered through the center; the space between the circles misted. Jaspen looked beyond the medallion to the structure of the ore where lacy strings of pulsating energy danced. He greeted mentor, the noble spirit whose bodily death had given them fuel, therefore life to those on this spaceship.

Mentor's mindspark powered the ship. The creature's life force had been spewing into the void of space for decades now as they headed toward old Earth. Fragments of the creature's spark were lost forever in the interstellar darkness outside the ship. But mentor had not been an ordinary being; it had been a singular species, able to create life amidst the icy world on which it had lived. So, when Jaspen watched the threads of mindspark that still remained within the ore he could easily sense mentor's strength.

One of the energy threads swayed, curving back in on itself in response to the oreseeker's mental hello. Jaspen watched through the Spiriteye and saw a red filament reach toward him; the energy shot out and touched the medallion. The circular metalloid flared as if it had caught on fire, but the brightness of spirit did not bother Jaspen's sensitive eyes.

He grinned as the string of energy wriggled through the pendant and cavorted around his head like a rainbow lightning storm at night. The sense of mentor was so strong it was as if the large white-furred creature actually stood within the chamber.

Oreseeker, you honor me with your presence. Mentor's words were not spoken but projected into Jaspen's mind making it feel like a conversation that had already taken place. *You are restless.*

"I'm anxious to be off this ship." Jaspen

answered from the core of his mind.

The mentor's musical laugh echoed in Jaspen's head. *If you understood the essence of time you would have no restlessness. Everything you perceive as yet to happen has already occurred. Everything that is past has not yet happened.*

Jaspen was used to receiving such thoughts from mentor but even after years of conversations he felt no wiser for it. He tried to stretch his thinking in order to fully encompass what mentor told him, but often the ideas only jumbled in his mind to later haunt him with confusion.

You have the aura of zaddack about you. Mentor paused, waiting for his response.

"I rested with the zaddacks before coming here."

That is good, mentor's thoughts flowed smoothly. *Jaspen, when you are on old Earth, I will no longer be with you.* The words were crystal clear.

"Where will you be?" A kernel of despair hardened in the pit of Jaspen's stomach. "Are you more depleted than you appear to me?"

It's true that much of me has already gone to the void between the stars. Each time we have landed, left planets, or changed course, more of me has gone. Mentor thought laughed again, a sound of goodness. *I have done what I can; now I wish you to set me free. After the ship has landed on Earth, use your ability to pull what remains of my mindspark from this crysolium. I do not wish to remain.*

"We could just have Minack heat the chamber and purge your energy out through the fuel spouts."

No. Mentor's mental tone was emphatic. *Purging is crude and alters the pure form of*

mindspeak, scattering it. I wish to have intact what remains of me. Do not condemn me to entrapment within this structure, a fate between life and death.

“I’ll do whatever you ask,” Jaspén’s bright eyes dimmed, “but,” he stopped thinking for a moment in order to let his selfishness go. Then he thought simply, “what you ask of me is difficult. Only once have I tried to manipulate energy within crysolium and that time I had Serall’s help.”

The task will be simple because there is only me in here—no energy from others to untangle. And you have the Spiriteye pendant. Believe what I say. You will find this task doable.

Jaspén frowned, his mind full of sorrow. “When I set your energy free, I will truly be alone.”

Someday, if you allow it, your heart will not ache as it does now. Remember that the way of the universe is the way of the universe. There is a time to feel, a time to act, and a time to understand. When there is nothing to be done about something it is best to accept. Like this great Dark—a Shadow of creation which now eats this universe.

“Are you saying there’s nothing we can do about the Darkness?” Jaspén hunkered down tighter into his cloak.

Oreseeker, you most of all should understand that within the dark lies the light. One can not be without the other.

“I know the beauty, the splendid secrets of the shadows. But this Dark thing from the edge of the unknown will destroy us all. It is not ordinary darkness.”

I can envision the moment at the beginning of time when the light of creation cast the coils of darkness away—shunning the Dark. Yet I myself do not know its true nature. Mentor’s thoughts paused

and there was a deep churning sensation. *This Dark is beyond the scope of what I am and what I understand. I only know that it is coming.*

“When I release your energy, where will your mindspark go?” Jaspen held his breath as the question slipped into his thoughts.

The silence within the crysolium chamber echoed dramatically inside Jaspen’s skull. He feared his question was somehow inappropriate and that he had driven mentor’s thoughts from his mind. Yet, he could still see the pulsating rhythm within the ore, like a powerful creature in hiding.

Everything is perception. Mentor’s thoughts curled quietly around Jaspen’s brain, like hands holding a baby. As mentor went on Jaspen thought he heard the far off sound of trickling water and the song of wind in the trees.

When I think-speak with you it feels to me as if you, with your mindspark still contained within the physical self, are less whole than me—for even with your special eyes you can not see the truth of what surrounds you.

“What truth?”

The truth of who and what you are. We are all uniquely who we are, but we, all species, all life, is the same.

“How can something be different and the same?”

Without physical separation all is the same.

“If that’s true, why should we fight to stay alive? Why do we fear death?”

Because the steps you take while within your body determine the path you will walk in death. Something inside you knows that. The lust for a physical life is powerful.

Jaspen’s eyes watered and he blinked, closing

off their light for an instant. “Mentor, I long to join you. I’m tired of who I am. There are no others like myself.”

You still miss the human female Serall.

Jaspen knew he could not cloud the truth from mentor. “Even though she belonged to another man I always loved her. After a time I could hide the depth of my feelings so she did not know, but inside myself I always hoped that someday...” Jaspen shook his head.

In life you hoped one day she might be yours—that she would see the strength of your love for her and be drawn to it like an oreseeker to darkness. I see that with her death you still hoped she might come to you—that you, with your eyes, would be able to see her mindspark as you see me within the crysolium now. Finally then, with her physical death, you would have a part of her no one else did.

Jaspen hung his head, embarrassed by the truth.

The energy around you is weighted with sorrow. You associate your change from human into oreseeker with Serall. You have not wanted me to touch that pain before.

“I’m afraid.” Jaspen realized he was no longer holding the medallion yet the mentor’s word thoughts were undiminished in clarity.

That if you let your feelings out...

“That if I let them out I’ll drown under the weight. Then what is barely tolerable now will be unendurable.” The thoughts tumbled forth from his mind and he felt the reality of them. His cloak was suddenly too thin. He shivered. “Why couldn’t I remain human? Why did I have to change?” The last thought was echoed with his voice. “Why?”

I wish I could offer you comfort but the pain is your own. It is for you to find a way to peace.

Jaspen spoke out loud. “When Serall died, did you feel her mindspark?” He was ashamed of the hunger in his words.

There was a long silence before mentor thought spoke again. *No.*

The crysolium chamber was still and dark save for the ghostly embers of the oreseeker’s eyes.

“Do you think Jeriah and Serall are together in death?” Jaspen’s thought was ringed with pain.

Their bond of love was not one which transcends bodily death.

“She is alone, then.” Jaspen’s eyes glittered and his chest loosened. He felt a stab akin to pleasure and hated himself for it.

Mentor’s mental tone was tinged with curiosity. *This gives you good feelings?*

“I’m ashamed, but it does. I suppose I’ve been thinking that if they were to spend eternity together she would never... she would not...”

Remember you.

“Yes.” Jaspen’s whispered word hung in the darkness of the chamber.

It may come to be that your love for Serall will be your undoing. You have much energy tied up into what wasn’t and what can never be.

“I know.” Jaspen rocked onto his heels to comfort himself. “I know it’s senseless but I can’t let go of her. It’s as if she’s burned permanently into the network of my mind and everything I think goes through that reflection of her. I hope that in death I find release from this torture.”

Be careful, Jaspen, what you desire.

“What could be worse than loving her as I still do? Or more difficult than watching her spend

her life with another and to see her produce children that are not mine?” Jaspen pressed his forehead against his fists as if to drive out the thoughts. “What could be more devastating than not having my love returned? What?” The oreseeker spoke out loud again as if that would help the mentor truly understand his torment.

Her loving you.

“What?” Jaspen sat back in surprise, his wide eyes lighting the rocky surface of the crysolium. The pale light created shadows between the miniature peaks of the ore as if his eyes were moons and the lump of crysolium a planet.

Sometimes actually receiving love is worse than unfulfilled longing for that love. Mentor’s words hung between their minds.

“Never! I...” Jaspen paused, closed his eyes and quieted his mind before going on. “Mentor, my respect for you is unlimited but you must believe me when I say that nothing on any planet I’ve seen is worse than the desolation within my own body.”

There are consequences to all actions and the path you have not walked may be far worse than the one you are on.

There was a long mental silence. The chill of the chamber seeped between Jaspen’s cloak and skin. He rose and when he moved away the exterior of the c-ore darkened though the interior remained filled with fire. He paced the tiny room to warm himself. Thoughts roiled his mind. Desolation and anger at mentor’s words coursed through his veins as he moved back and forth across the chamber. He stopped and turned to face the life that infused the ore.

“I know what you say must be true or you wouldn’t say it. But I can’t change the way I feel and

if somehow I could, and did, I would no longer know who I am. I've lived with these emotions for so long they define me." Jaspén took a deep breath. "My world revolves around Serall even though it's all in my own mind."

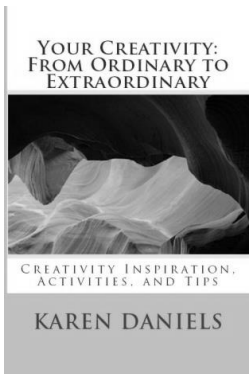
Sobeyit. The archaic phrase from Riatha sounded odd coming from mentor. *I didn't mean to upset you or tell you how to feel. But your pain envelops me when we mind-speak and I can't help but want to ease the strength of it.* Mentor's thoughts were warm and caressing. *You have much to face in the future. Do what you can do for that is all there is. And there are Serall's children, Kala and Noa, for you to watch over and love. That task has now fallen to you and the Bioguard Minack. They, and the other children, need you to be there for them.*

"I know." Jaspén cocked his head and grimaced. "Though they were not fathered by me, I will always be there for them." In thinking of Serall's children Jaspén once more became aware of the ship surrounding them. He tilted his head, then gave a slight nod. "I must go now. Minack will bring back the ship lights soon."

So you must. Be well, oreseeker.

"And you, mentor." Jaspén gave the crysolium a final lingering look before hefting the door open. The outer room was warm in contrast to the ore chamber. His soft boots slid across the floor. As he passed the zaddacks, Ryn's eyes blinked open, golden slits in the darkness. Jaspén bowed, then headed back up through the ship.

End sample



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List Price \$4.99

Format: Kindle Edition

File Size: 273 KB

ASIN: B004Z80R4M

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