

THIRD IMPERIUM

By Christopher B. Tucker

Dedicated to Andy Emerson,
William M. Tucker
and
Johnny Tucker.

Much thanks to Lucasfilm, Ltd. for allowing me and others to enjoy the
original
Star Wars movies
on video.

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Chapter 1: Laughter

The *Shadow Chaser* zoomed out of hyperspace and approached Yavin 4. One Nebulon B Frigate, one MC90 Mon Cal Cruiser and two medium transports were just coming around the corner of the planet. Luke Skywalker, piloting the *Shadow Chaser*, turned on the Comm System. “This is Luke Skywalker returning from Coruscant to my Jedi Academy.” A Calimarian Comm Operator on the Mon Cal Cruiser replied, “You have clearance to land. We are sending four A-wings to escort you.”

The four ships came out of the Frigate’s docking bay and formed a square around the *Shadow Chaser*. The five vehicles went through the atmosphere and approached the Massassi Temple, which housed the Jedi Academy. At

the last minute, the A-wings swerved off and headed back to the protective fleet orbiting Yavin 4.

Luke Skywalker landed the *Shadow Chaser* at the Jedi Academy with Jacen, Jaina, Tenel Ka, Lowbacca and Em Teedee (hovering just above Jacen's head) to greet him. The hangar bay was unusually full. The *Rock Dragon* and the *Lightning Rod* were there, together with ships owned by other visiting Jedi knights.

Luke said, "I haven't decided what to do with all the extra credits now that we don't need weapons. By the way, there's a gathering at 17:00 hours tomorrow. I've come with more supplies from Coruscant, and Leia told me that you, Jacen and Jaina, should come home soon and bring your friends."

Jacen, Jaina and their friends had already graduated from the Jedi Academy. They were here now just to visit and their mother apparently wanted them home. "A Jedi's work is never done," said Jacen.

"Speaking of work, I have a diplomacy mission coming up," commented Tenel Ka. "It's going to be in the Hapes Consortium. The New Republic thought I would be good for the job, since I'm native to Hapes."

"I'm almost done with the new backup Power Conversion Unit," said Jaina. "I'll probably finish by the time we're ready to leave."

"Good, the old one breaks down exactly 3.4 times per standard season. The New Republic promised to get me one, but then they became tangled up with a troublemaker in the senate," said Luke. "Sometimes I think it's easier being a Jedi than a senator. Anyway, see you at supper."

Just then, a buzzer sounded and Luke took a Comlink from a pouch in his belt. "Luke Skywalker... Yup, I'll be right there... Okay, I'll hurry," were Luke's words into the Voice Pick-up. He then put away the unit. The master of the Jedi Academy turned to Jacen, Jaina, Lowie and Tenel Ka and explained, "That was Artoo. He said we're receiving a message from the Orbital Defense Fleet. Anyway, see you at supper."

That night at supper, Luke Skywalker sat at one of the guest tables with Jacen, Jaina and Tenel Ka. He inquired as to why their good friends, Raynar,

Zekk and Lusa, the centaur girl, were not with them, since he knew that they also had returned to the Academy for this visit.

Tenel Ka explained that the three missing friends were not “missing” at all, but just camping out in the beautiful Massassi jungle for a while.

“So where’s Lowbacca and Em Teedee?” Luke continued.

“They left us a little while ago. Em Teedee said they were going to the Computer Room. He didn’t say what he was doing,” said Jaina.

“Okay,” said Luke. “By the way, I think you should know this. Remember when I got that call from the fleet? Well, right after my A-wing escorts returned to their hangars and the doors shut, all systems crashed. They fixed the communications systems very quickly and immediately contacted me. They told me to be on the lookout for anything strange, and I’m asking you to do the same.”

Then, to change the subject, he said, “Anyway, Jacen, think of leaving this way: the whole Academy won’t fall apart because of the food fights your animals create!”

Jacen spotted Lowbacca walking in. Then Jaina spotted him. Jacen waved him over and he sat down at the table with Em Teedee.

“I remember that,” murmured Jacen. “My crystal snake was loose.” Now he continued a little clearer and louder. “Yea, now it won’t be *my* fault. It will be yours!” Jacen said with a laugh.

With that, Luke said, “I don’t think so, I’ll make sure no animals get out of their *professional* cages.”

“Professional cages!?! The only reason I didn’t build better cages is because I *liked* the food fights!” exclaimed Jaina.

“Oh really! That’s interesting,” said Luke with a chuckle. “Then maybe I’ll have to put all the animals in rickety old wooden cages, or maybe the cages in the worst shape. How would that be, eh?”

“Oh, I think that’ll do just fine, just perfectly fine. Now all the other Thuls, as in *Raynar Thul*, will have to clean their beauteous little costumes,” remarked Jacen. *No offenses, Raynar, you got to admit you were at least a little conceded, not that you are anymore.*

Then Jacen started laughing. Jaina had to admit that it *was* sort of funny, and giggled too. Lowbacca made the Wookiee version of a laugh, remembering his days as a trainee. Tenel Ka just smiled; she was partly from Dathomir and was a warrior girl. All the other old visitors started laughing and some pulled up chairs to the table where all the laughter had originated, remembering the funny times they all had when they were trainees, and how conceded Raynar had been. Pretty soon, the laughing filled the entire dining area. The noise of the current trainees could barely be heard over all the laughing.

Chapter 2: Surprise!

That night, Luke couldn't seem to get to sleep. He tossed and turned, but still couldn't get to sleep. Something, something was wrong. He closed his eyes, so at least he could rest. But then he was awoken by something he never had expected to hear again. When he opened his eyes, he saw a shimmering image of a man with a white beard dressed in a Jedi's cloak.

"Luke," said a familiar voice.

"Ben?"

"Luke, you are in great danger."

“What is it?” asked Luke. He knew it must be important, since last time his late mentor had contacted him, Ben Kenobi had said he could never talk to Luke again.

“I thought I would never have to tell you about this dark secret, but they will attack soon.”

“What is it? What is this dark secret you speak of?” Luke repeated. He was getting impatient, as he often did when Ben spoke to him. He never seemed to hear Luke.

Which is what happened this time. “Luke, your academy is in great danger. It will be the first of many victims. The galaxy is no longer safe. Luke, do not turn down the dark path. Do not give in to anger, hate, aggression. Beware the dark side. Trust the Force; use it only for knowledge and defense. May the Force be with you.”

“Ben! I need more! Ben!” but the shimmering image faded away.

Tenel Ka was sleeping in her room when she heard a faint noise. She sprang from her bed immediately. She ran to the door and opened it. She was about to wake up Jacen, Jaina and Lowbacca when she spotted them already running to Luke’s room. Just as they got to the Computer Room, they saw Luke.

“Uncle Luke, we have a problem!” Jaina cried out.

“I know! You go on and activate the energy shield and control the guns!” Luke shouted. “The Academy is being fired upon, but I don’t know by whom!” Luke actually *did* have an idea of who it was, though. *This is the dark warrior Ben warned me about. But I must not mention this to anyone else, when the time comes, the galaxy will be warned of this impending danger. I must not alarm anyone, not yet.*

Lowbacca was the first one in the Computer Room. Then Tenel Ka. Then Jacen. Then Jaina. Jaina activated the energy shield to protect the Academy from enemy fire. Everyone else jumped into a Firing Unit, from which they could shoot at attackers. Jaina finished activating the energy field but there weren’t any guns left.

“I’ll give up my gun,” said Jacen.

“No thanks,” said Jaina.

Then she heard a burning sound. Jaina looked out a small window. She saw that a young Massassi tree had caught on fire.

“What’s wrong?” asked Jacen.

“Oh nothing,” replied Jaina, knowing that Jacen would be sad if the tree died.

“Let me see,” said Jacen.

Jaina repeated, “Don’t worry. It’s really nothing.” She moved away, so Jacen ignored it.

A couple of moments later, Jacen walked over to the same window.

“No!” shouted Jaina, running back to the window.

“Oh come on,” said Jacen. Jaina couldn’t prevent him from seeing; after all, he was her brother and she wasn’t going to use force on him. So Jaina got out of the way. Jacen saw the tree burning. He immediately jumped into a nearby Fire Deterrent Spraying Unit.

“You take over my gun!” shouted Jacen over his shoulder. With that, Jaina jumped into his Firing Unit. Just then, Luke came running into the Computer Room.

“I’ll take over at the Radar/Communications Center!” he exclaimed.

The Jedi Knights’ target was a small life form firing from outside the Academy. Nobody could see what species it was.

“Grrrowl grrruff. Grrrowl grrrruff.”

Em Teedee translated in his high worried voice: “Lowbacca wants to say ‘I lost him!’”

“Me too!” shouted Jaina.

Luke said, shaking his head, “Me three, but I know the general direction in which he went. Unfortunately, it’s the most dangerous and unknown part of the woods. We could try to use a scanner or the Force to find his exact location, but there are so many trees and other animals, it would be difficult.”

“We all lost him. Let’s send a distress signal to Coruscant anyway,” suggested Jacen. “The enemy may return.”

“Grrrowl grrruff grrruff!”

“Lowbacca has just said, ‘Yes, good idea,’” Em Teedee chimed in.

“Yes, good idea,” agreed Tenel Ka.

“I think we all agree,” Luke said with a sigh.

Chapter 3: Changed Code

“I’ll type in the code to access the Academy Comm System,” Luke said. When he typed in the code, the security light turned red. “That’s funny. The code’s changed.” Luke called Artoo Detoo (R2-D2) on his portable intercom system. “I need help in the Computer Room.”

Artoo Detoo got the message in the Energy Room. He beeped five times over his internal intercom system, then he rushed to the Computer Room. When Artoo arrived, Luke was waiting for him by the door.

“Someone’s changed the security code for the Comm System.”

Artoo trundled over to the console. A door in his casing opened and a computer interface arm emerged. It plugged into a socket to see if there was any real problem. Artoo beeped six times and whistled twice and shook his head. What he said was, “Someone’s forgotten the new code! Remember changing it?” The barrel-shaped droid backed off and retracted his computer interface arm.

Luke shook his head and remembered that he had changed the code, himself, last week. He thanked Artoo and the droid went off. Luke entered the new code and proceeded to send the distress signal to Coruscant. He was hoping to get reinforcements soon.

“What did Artoo say, Em Teedee?” asked Jacen. Em Teedee scooted over to Jacen from beside Lowbacca.

He replied, “First of all, you should definitely learn Artoo’s language, Jacen. Second of all, Artoo said that Luke had forgotten the new security code. He himself had changed it last week!”

Just then, they all heard a noise...

Chapter 4: Response

The noise was the response call from the Imperial Palace on Coruscant. “What is it?” asked Leia, who was the first to notice the distress signal.

“We were under attack!” exclaimed Jaina.

“By some odd creature,” said Luke, from beside Jacen. “I’ve never seen anything like it in my life.”

“Okay,” said Leia, “Just a second...” The group at the Academy overheard her call out, “Han! It’s the Jedi Academy!”

Han came running from the South Entrance of the Imperial Palace. “What is it, Leia?”

“The Jedi Academy was under attack!”

“By whom?” asked Han, with a worried look on his face.

“Who were you attacked by?” asked Leia, going back to the intercom radio to talk to their children and Luke at the Academy again.

“We don’t know. Our Orbital Defense Fleet would help, except they’re having trouble with most all systems,” replied Luke.

Before Leia could turn to Han to pass on Luke’s response, Han threw up his hands and said, “I know, I heard Luke over the intercom.”

“We’ll call DRAPAC,” said Han. “It’s closer to your sector than we are.” As Luke and his friends knew, DRAPAC stood for Defense Research and Planetary Assistance Center.

Back at the Academy, Jaina turned off the intercom system. On Coruscant, Leia pressed “Clear” and dialed the number to get to DRAPAC. She stepped aside so that the usual Communications Officer could resume his position at the Comm System Desk.

“DRAPAC, this is Comm Officer Gjankwit at the Imperial Palace on Coruscant. We need reinforcements on Yavin 4.”

“Huh?” The voice on the other end gave a yawn. “Wh-Who is this?” said Comm Officer Sandwrit, the Communications Officer at DRAPAC.

“This is Comm Officer Gjankwit at the Imperial Palace on Coruscant.”

“Send the NR code,” asked Sandrit.

“Transmitting now,” Gjinkwat replied.

“Clearance granted,” Sandwit was relieved that this wasn’t an intruder.
“What do need, sir?”

“The Jedi Academy located on Yavin 4 was under attack. They need reinforcements.”

“Okay. We’ll send reinforcements as soon as we can. Estimated time until arrival, one standard day.”

“Thank you. Signing off.”

Back at the Jedi Academy, Jaina was thinking about the mysterious creature that had attacked them. “The creature will come back, but as soon as help arrives from DRAPAC and Coruscant, it will probably disappear again. Then when we’re pretty sure that the ‘Thing’ will not come back, and the reinforcements leave, it probably *will* return!”

“Don’t worry,” said Luke. “We won’t let the reinforcements leave until we’ve gotten to the bottom of this. We’ll have all available ships searching the entire Yavin system.”

“Grrrrr rawww gerrahh,” said Lowie (‘Lowie’ was Lowbacca’s nickname).

“Oh no! Master Lowbacca has detected something approaching the Academy!” exclaimed Em Teedee frantically. “It might be the creature!”

“It could be the reinforcements,” suggested Jacen.

“It couldn’t be reinforcements,” said Tenel Ka. “They couldn’t have arrived so soon, even traveling at light speed.”

“But what about hyperspace?” asked Jacen.

“They couldn’t have gotten the ships ready this fast either,” continued Tenel Ka.

“Grrraw grrraw,” said Lowie.

Em Teedee piped in to translate, as always. “Master Lowbacca is continuing the conversation and he wants to say, first of all, that the object is traveling on land. Second of all, the object is smaller than any spacecraft that could be coming from DRAPAC or Coruscant. As a matter of fact, no ship has ever been made for space travel that is that small.”

“Well, that’s one reason it wouldn’t be the reinforcements,” Jacen said with a laugh. “As a matter of fact, it’s two!” Jacen, unlike Tenel Ka, always kept his sense of humor, even in a tense situation.

“I say that we should get underground,” commented Jaina.

Tenel Ka disagreed, and said, “I think this Thing is more than just a creature. We may want to go out there and meet it head on.” Tenel Ka was very tough, a trait which ran in her family. Her father had once owned a Rancor. She was not the type to hide from danger.

“I really think you were right, Jaina, about the theory that the Thing would go away when reinforcements come, and return when they leave,” continued Tenel Ka. “Wouldn’t it be best to get out there now, *before* the reinforcements scare it away?”

Luke spoke up. “I’ll warn the rest of the Academy that another attack may arise,” he said. “You guys try to figure out if this recent radar detection signifies another attack, or if it’s just a forest creature. Depending on what you find out, you may want to face the creature now, as Tenel Ka suggested, or wait underground until more help arrives. I leave the decision up to you all. You are old enough now to handle problems such as this.”

He continued, “Whatever decision you make, be sure to inform me. If you decide not to fight at this time, meet me at S.R.A1. Be brave and trust the Force to guide your actions.”

Chapter 5: Attack!

Jacen, Jaina, Tenel Ka, Lowbacca and Em Teedee went back to the radar computer. Lowbacca typed in words and computer codes to try to figure out the exact location and appearance of the creature.

Meanwhile, Luke went over to the A.I.C.S. (Academy Internal Communications System). He prepared to inform all trainees, workers and teachers that an attack was possibly in their future.

“ATTENTION. ATTENTION. This is Luke Skywalker. There is a creature outside the Academy. This creature may have been the source of the attack earlier this morning. Some of you may have heard it. Some of you may not have. We are lucky to have some Jedi Knights, recent graduates of this Academy, visiting. They are working now to figure out if we need to fear this creature or not. Try to stay away from any windows and openings to the outside. Remember, a true Jedi can overcome his or her fears, although it is natural to have them. Please remain calm. The Force is with us.”

Back at the radar computer, Jacen, Jaina and their friends began to see a wire-frame image on the computer screen. It seemed to be an image of the view from the top of the great Jedi Temple, looking down on the trees. The picture began to have color. When the picture became completely colored in, the view became the view of a bird flying off the top of the Temple. Jacen recognized the young Massassi tree that had caught fire during the first attack of the unknown creature. He hoped with all his heart that the beautiful tree would survive.

The image displayed then moved out from above the Temple into the nearby woods. The advanced computer was able to track unknown objects up to ten miles away. After that, the radar system would take over, although with less detail and no color. This radar system could cover the entire planet, including its atmosphere and the outer layer of space up to 80 miles out.

Just then, a targeting sight appeared on the screen. “That must be where the creature is,” said Jaina, remaining calm. The view started zooming in on the area of forest in the middle of the targeting sight. They then saw the creature! It was skimming along on a hoverspeeder towards the Jedi temple.

The view changed frequently, showing each side of the creature. Starting with the front and then going towards the back. At the front they noticed a red face with black stripes going down it. He had one horn on each side of his head and one in the front and back -- four all together! He was wearing a black hooded robe. When the view was of the back, the Jedi knights noticed something amazing. The creature had a third eye in the back of its head!

“That’s weird. The rest of the body resembles a human,” said Tenel Ka.

From over at the A.I.C.S., Luke asked, “What’s the creature?”

“Something that resembles a human, but has a third eye in the back!” replied Jacen.

Luke immediately turned back to the A.I.C.S. “ATTENTION. This is Luke Skywalker again. The creature is not one from the forest. Everyone must proceed now to Security Room A1. Repeat. Everyone must proceed now to S.R.A1 as quickly as possible. May the Force be with you.”

They all heard the sound of the hoverspeeder coming closer and closer to the temple. On the computer radar screen, the Jedi knights saw the creature speeding towards the east side of the temple. They needed to act fast!

“Let’s go out there face to face,” suggested Tenel Ka once again.

The attacker fired three ion blasts. The Academy’s shields, unable to resist the immense amount of electrical discharge from the blasts, weakened fast. Sparks flew from the shield generator, and in a matter of seconds, it exploded! The creature fired a set of laser blasts at the Temple. When the blasts hit, rocks tumbled off the side of the Academy.

Everyone in the area of the explosion ran even faster towards S.R.A1 and a trainee tumbled out of an open hole in the side of the temple! Two Wookies (brother and sister) noticed this and ran out to try to save Ian, the unlucky trainee. More rocks tumbled down since they were unsupported, with the loss of the wall. The Wookies climbed over the rocks and picked up Ian. They ran carrying him to shelter.

Meanwhile, hearing the explosion from inside, Jaina exclaimed, “This creature is powerful. We may have a better chance of destroying it if we use the Firing Units.”

In any event, they all knew now that they wouldn’t be waiting for the reinforcements. They had no choice but to defend themselves. Jacen, Jaina and Tenel Ka all jumped into Firing Units.

“Grrruff grrrowl grrrr,” roared Lowbacca.

“What Master Lowbacca is trying to say is that since we do not have a gun to use, we will join the others. He will leave one of the Emergency Comlinks here, so we can be in touch at all times.”

Em Teedee was frightened by another ion blast. Then another blast followed. No doubt the creature was trying to immobilize all of the Academy’s systems. Tenel Ka and Jacen were now firing back furiously. Jaina was trying to concentrate on both Em Teedee and the attacking creature. Lowie clipped one of the Comlinks to his belt and another one next to Jaina. Then he ran with his translator friend towards S.R.A1.

Luke turned to follow Lowbacca, but then stopped and gazed at the young Jedi knights, “Good luck, and may the Force be with you.” There was pride in his eyes.

Chapter 6: The Mysterious Jedi

Luke Skywalker and Lowbacca were beginning to run down the corridor while Em Teedee turned his microrepulsor jets to full speed. When everybody turned the corner, they noticed three trainees. One looked hurt, and was being held by the other trainees, who were Wookies.

“Rrrrrr grrrrr,” growled Lowie. The two Wookies stopped and turned their heads, growling a response to Lowie.

Meanwhile, back at the North Defense Center, Jacen, Jaina and Tenel Ka kept firing. Another dual laser blast struck the Temple. Tenel Ka was now very mad. She didn’t want the three-eyed creature to cause any more damage to the great Massassi Temple now used to train Jedi. She targeted carefully,

using only the Force. When she felt confident that her aim was good, she fired. She scored a direct hit right on the modified hoverspeeder's engines!

Still, some of the hoverspeeder's repulsor jets remained intact. Just then, Jaina blasted the ion cannon. The creature turned to retreat and spotted several trees with dangerous living tentacles. He would have to avoid them. Then he saw three creatures coming out of the forest! Two of them were humans and the third was unidentifiable from the distance.

Blaster bolts were fired from these three. Most areas of the hoverspeeder were hit. The small ship careened out of control then came to a sudden stop. It had been caught a tree's living tentacles. The strange attacker tried to escape but a tentacle wrapped itself around his left arm.

Jacen, Jaina and Tenel Ka continued to fire, but not directly at the creature. They only shot in areas around the cluster of tentacled trees, keeping their victim from escaping! The three other creatures who had recently emerged from the forest did the same. Although Jacen was relieved to receive the unexpected help, he still felt a tingle of foreboding through the Force.

"I have a bad feeling about this," he murmured.

"I sense a disturbance also," added Tenel Ka.

"Count me in," said Jaina.

The Jedi's senses were correct, because just then the three-eyed creature freed his arms from the tentacles though his body was still stuck. He drew a light saber from a belt around his waist! Strangely enough, the creature held the light saber handle with two hands, probably because the handle was unusually long, everyone thought, though they were dazzled with bewilderment.

The attacker was also holding the handle horizontally, not vertically. Then another odd thing occurred. The creature, now known to be some sort of Jedi, ignited one end of the blade and a few seconds later another blade extended from the opposite side! It shone a bright red.

The dangerous attacker slashed away tentacles with the dual ends of the light saber. Just then, a tree wrapped all its tentacles around the strange humanoid creature's body. The tentacles were soon slashed off, but then the entire tree tumbled backward! It seemed as if an invisible force had pushed it. The Jedi saw this and the same idea struck them all at the same moment; perhaps it was *the* Force! Now the creature truly seemed to have Jedi powers!

Jacen and Jaina's faces showed their amazement. The warrior girl, Tenel Ka, was also surprised, but her face didn't show it. She broke the silence. Her voice was calm, as always, despite the frightening turn of events. "This is a very dangerous and strange situation. We know this must be some type of Jedi, but I have never seen or heard of a double-ended light saber. I suggest we contact Master Luke immediately."

Meanwhile, the creature continued his struggle with the indomitable, tentacled, carnivorous trees.

"I'll call him on the Comlink!" Jacen offered, his fingers already flying across the controls of the unit with amazing speed.

"Good idea!" exclaimed Jaina, still firing. "This attacker has proved even more dangerous than we had anticipated! I hope those reinforcements from DRAPAC get here soon! Even with six of us firing, he's breaking free! By the way, who *are* our helpers from within the forest?!"

Tenel Ka, her quad-laser turret still blasting away, responded quietly, her eyes half shut. "I think I know..."

Chapter 7: The Battle's Conclusion

Back in the corridor of the Jedi Training Academy Temple, Master Luke Skywalker, Lowbacca the chocolate-furred Wookie and the miniaturized translator droid Em Teedee had caught up with the two Wookies (brother and sister) and the human, Ian, whom they had earlier rescued. It turned out that the Wookies were actually Lowie's younger cousins. The girl was named Junnakuk, or Junnie for short, and the boy was named Growbacca, nicknamed Growie.

After the Wookie duo was finished growling the tale of what had happened, it was decided that next they would find somewhere safe nearby where Ian could rest. After he had caught his breath, he would be transferred to the care of 2-1B, the medic droid. 2-1B was located in a room in the center core of the Temple, drilled underground for maximum safety.

In the meantime, Em Teedee would run a diagnostics test to see what Ian's exact injuries were. Then they would use one of the emergency med-kits stashed in various locked compartments around the temple (the compartments also contained one repulsor-stretcher each, in case of an injury which prevented the patient from being able to walk).

The group had found a bench where Ian could lie in a nearby room. Em Teedee was still running the diagnostics. "Hmm—yes, yes. Ahh, hmm—ohh! Yes, oh my!"

"What is it?" asked everyone at once (with the Wookies saying it in Wookie growls!).

"Dear me! It appears Master Ian has broken his left leg! He also has several bruises and cuts, but I don't think you needed my tests to know that!" exclaimed Em Teedee in his usual high squeaky voice.

Luke Skywalker, founder of the Jedi Academy, turned around and began running out of the room. He stopped and said, "I'm getting a repulsor stretcher and other supplies from a med-kit. Ian, we'll get you down to 2-1B in no time to get that leg taken care of." Ian nodded vaguely. Seeing that Ian would be all right until he got back with the med-kit, Luke went off down a corridor.

Meanwhile, over in the North Defense Center (NDC), things were getting even worse! The creature was breaking free, and fast! Jaina, very annoyed, said, "I know that killing without reason would lead one to the Dark Side, but this is now with reason!" With that, she targeted and let out with a volley of quad-laser blasts.

The strange creature must've sensed the increase in the weapon fire because in less than a second he had slashed off an entire branch, freeing himself from the trees. He flipped into the air and landed just out of reach of the tentacles. Since this mysterious stranger had a light saber with two ends, it was much easier for him to deflect the incoming blasts. The first volley of laser fire ricocheted harmlessly off into the forest.

The next set skimmed the side of the temple after being deflected off the dual-ended light saber! This meant, the Jedi knew, that the attacker was now *aiming* the deflected blaster shots! Before anyone could do anything about it, the creature deflected the next, and last, shots directly back at the quad-laser turrets!

Jacen, grabbing the emergency Comlink (he had been having trouble reaching his uncle Luke up until now), joined the others in diving away from the quad-laser emplacements. Even without their Jedi instincts, they knew they were in grave danger. A moment after the Jedi landed on the hard stone floor, the blasts struck! Unfortunately, the explosion was larger than they had anticipated. It sent powerful shock waves through the small group of Jedi. When the dust settled, Jacen, Jaina and Tenel Ka were almost unconscious. Tenel Ka was the first to stir.

“Jacen, my friend. Jaina...” she said, with a rare hint of urgency in her voice. She shook them both.

“Huh?...” murmured Jaina, her eyes blinking and squinting. “Huh, wh-wh-what happened?”

“Jaina. It is I, Tenel Ka. Can you see me?” the warrior girl asked quietly but with great concern. Behind them, where the explosion had now faded, large rocks and small were occasionally falling down from the now unsupported blast site.

“Yeah, I see you,” replied Jaina. She sat up carefully and looked around. Then she remembered what had happened. “Where’s Jacen!?” she asked.

Then, as if in response to her question, Jacen woke up. “Jaina? Tenel Ka? You guys all right?”

“Are *we* all right? The question is, are *you* all right?!” Jaina said with a snort.

“I’m kind of okay. I think I hurt my arm,” Jacen replied.

Seeing that everyone was safe, Tenel Ka ran over to the hole. She stretched out her hand and half closed her eyes. “We have a problem. Although the

carniverous trees must've come at the creature again, he has just now broken free.”

Jaina bolted to the ripped-open wall. She joined Tenel Ka in summoning the strength of the Force within her to prevent the attacker from escaping. The two Jedi stood with legs braced and arms outstretched. Jacen joined them, reaching out with his one uninjured arm, his eyes closed in concentration.

Their courageous attempt to prevent the creature's escape meant that they were now destined to meet him in head to head battle, for he was fast approaching the temple under the force of their Jedi willpower! As he drew close, Tenel Ka and Jaina lowered their arms and swiftly drew and ignited their lightsabers.

The creature was at the huge hole, which had been blown out of the temple wall. He had also re-ignited his own lightsaber!

“Take cover!” Jaina yelled to Jacen. For once, Jacen did exactly what his sister requested. He scrambled behind a console, taking the Comlink with him. The cloaked figure jumped through the hole and immediately struck at Jaina, but she succeeded in deflecting the powerful charge.

Tenel Ka took advantage of this moment of distraction and swung her lightsaber low. The strange, evil Jedi deflected Tenel Ka's blow and pushed his own lightsaber forward to strike both his opponents at once. To avoid his swing, Tenel Ka flipped into the air and landed behind her enemy. Jaina thrust her lightsaber up to meet the bright red blade wielded by the attacker.

The force of Jaina's lightsaber pushing forward on one side and the absence of any force on the other sent the creature off balance, but he recovered quickly. He swung around just in time and met Tenel Ka's blade with his own.

Enraged by Tenel Ka's slash that almost cost him his life, the creature flipped into the air and, upon landing, hurled objects toward Jaina and Tenel Ka through the power of the Force.

A storage container was slashed in half by Jaina, and Tenel Ka cut up another one.

The strange attacker, with a combination of his Jedi powers and his lightsaber, pushed Tenel Ka and Jaina crashing backwards. They fell to the ground after hitting the hard wall. The two companions tried to get up but couldn't. They were too weak from the crash.

The robed evil creature walked forward and prepared to slash Jaina and Tenel Ka into pieces. He had the same goal as the one his ancestors had nearly accomplished years before in the time of the New Order—to be in complete control of the Galaxy with no resistance. Destroying this Academy would be a large step forward towards accomplishing that goal.

Before he could do that though, he would have to kill these two Jedi and their fellow Jedi, whom he had seen scrambling behind a console.

Just then the strange humanoid creature felt himself being lifted into the air! Then he started moving backwards!

In confusion the dark warrior looked behind him and saw the male Jedi, who had been hiding, pulling him back with the Force!

With a swift sideways stroke of his arm, Jacen threw the cloaked figure out of the large blasted area and sent him tumbling down the side of the Massassi Temple. When he reached the bottom, the strange humanoid found the three creatures, who had been shooting at him from the forest, running towards him! The only difference was that now they were wielding lightsabers! The creature who had been unidentifiable earlier was now seen to be a centaur girl.

The Dark Jedi pushed them aside with the Force and continued on his unstoppable escape. He soon reached the end of the clearing and disappeared into the great Massassi jungle.

Jacen went over to the hole and said “Boy I’m glad that’s over.”

Jacen then went over to Jaina and Tenel Ka and helped them up.

“Jacen -- you saved us!” exclaimed Jaina.

“Hey, I couldn’t let you have all the fun!” joked Jacen, looking over from where he was helping up Tenel Ka. He gave Jaina a lopsided grin, which she returned.

Tenel Ka got up and thanked Jacen. Seeing Tenel Ka didn’t need any more help, Jacen went over to Jaina and the two embraced in a big bear hug.

“The creature may have escaped,” began Jacen, “but I sense he’ll have some trouble with someone else. We’re not the only ones who are attacked by forest creatures.” With that, Jacen went back to the blown out hole and surveyed the scene. “Hey -- you know those people who were helping us? They were Lusa, Raynar and Zekk!”

When Jaina heard this, she ran to the door but then stopped and turned around. “Can you walk?” she asked Jacen, a slightly worried look on her face.

“Well how do you think I got over to the window? I flew?! I can walk all right, but I doubt I can run.”

With that, Tenel Ka, Jaina and Jacen went down to the Landing Field door to meet their friends who had helped them with the earlier battle. On the Landing Field, the Jedi talked about the battle.

“I still don’t understand how the creature got past our Orbital Defense Fleet, and why the Fleet’s systems shut down, preventing them from sending reinforcements,” Jaina was saying.

“The Orbital Fleet’s systems shut down? That’s weird,” Zekk responded quizzically.

“Yeah,” agreed Jacen. “It’s also strange that at the beginning of our visit everything was fine. Last night at supper I was just telling jokes while Lowie was checking the Computer Room. Speaking of Lowie, we should probably call him, Em Teedee and Luke to report in. Jaina, could you see what’s wrong with this Comlink and fix it? I tried to call them during the attack, but it wasn’t working.”

“Sure,” replied Jaina, taking the small device. Not surprisingly, it took her no time to fix it. Jaina was mechanical whiz. She turned it on and called Luke, Lowie and Em Teedee.

“Hi, Lowie... Yeah... We drove away the attacker and we’re on our way to you to report in... Bye.”

“Before we go, I have a joke to tell!” exclaimed Jacen. Before anyone could stop him from telling one of his usually lame jokes, Jacen started right in. “What did the strange attacker say to the people inside the Massassi Temple? Nothing! Because he blasted their communications array!”

“Great joke,” said Jaina sarcastically.

“Good joke or not, I’m glad we are all safe, for now,” said the usually solemn Tenel Ka. The Jedi looked at each other, agreeing. They knew that this was only the beginning...

Chapter 8: Sharing Happiness and Horror

The group of Jedi stopped once they reached the door of Security Room A1. The door opened onto the side of a large platform, slightly elevated from the rest of the room. The room was filled with hundreds of stone chairs. Trainees occupied all the chairs and overflowed into the two aisles leading to the steps up to the platform.

Standing in the middle of the large platform was Luke, giving the speech he had told Jacen, Jaina, Tenel Ka and Lowbacca about earlier, when he had just returned from Coruscant. Flanking him were Lowie and Em Teedee, the oval-shaped miniature translating droid, and Tionne, Luke's assistant.

Lowie saw his friends and tapped Luke lightly on the shoulder. Luke whispered something in Tionne's ear, at which point she smoothly took over the speech. Luke then turned to Lowbacca, who quietly told Luke about the other Jedi's arrival in a series of gruffs and woofs. Luke turned and he, Lowie, and Em Teedee (who, having been previously been shut off, was quite unaware of the conclusion of the battle and chattered quite a bit) went to meet the other Jedi.

When the trio arrived at the door, Luke said, "Is there trouble, or has the good prevailed? We already are helping an injured trainee." "Well, you'll have another to treat, me, but there's no immediate danger. We have driven the creature off," Jacen continued in a much softer voice "but I know there're more out there," Jacen made a sweeping motion with his hand, indicating the galaxy. "There has to be; maybe a whole sector full of a secret organization, waiting for the right time to strike."

"And this *would* be the right time to strike. Bakura is near uprising, and no one knows why. That could be part of a whole plan; rule by fear of force...." Luke trailed off as he recited the Tarkin Doctrine. "No one mention this to anyone but New Republic Intelligence, the Chief of State, Minister of State, Admiral Ackbar, and other high-ranking members of the New Republic. It's too serious."

"Don't worry about that now; keep your mind here and now. What's this wounded trainee's name?" asked Jaina.

Zekk, Raynar, and Lusa had begun exchanging thoughts on this dark warrior. None were really afraid, it's just they never thought they would have to face an organization of Force-trained warriors.

"His name is Ian. Lowie's cousins, who are now training here, rescued him. Their names are Growbacca and Juunakuk. The three of them are next-door in a medical room," replied Luke.

"The attacker," said Tenel Ka "it had a double-sided lightsaber."

"Yes, I know—my senses alerted me of that. It was a dark Jedi, a Sith Lord..." Em Teedee cut Luke off.

“Oh, dear me! A Sith! We must warn the others! This is terrible, and my memory banks said they became extinct *millennia* ago! Oh dear oh dear, this is a most horrid situation!”

Lowie growled at Em Teedee angrily.

“I am *not* overreacting and I will *not* be quiet! Do you understand what this means! The Sith drew power from the Dark Side of the Force...”

Luke looked at Lowbacca, who growled again and shut off Em Teedee, again. His two orange photoreceptors dimmed, then went out. Em Teedee wobbled in the air, then dropped abruptly. Lowie was inclined to let him drop, but caught the little droid anyway.

“As for getting through the Defense Fleet,” Tenel Ka raised an eyebrow “the star craft this, this *Sith* used must have a missile launcher. Isn’t there the possibility it was carrying Mag Pulse missiles? After all, we do know the fleet’s systems’ shut down.”

Lowie growled and gruffed and woofed and barked, all in his own language. Nobody understood what he had said (it had been very fast and therefore incomprehensible), so he switched Em Teedee back on. When Lowie had again growled, gruffed, woofed and barked in his language, Em Teedee (again very speedily and excitedly) translated “Master Lowbacca would like to say that while he was in the computer center, he had noticed some interesting readings. He now believes that that was the Sith’s space craft, called an *Infiltrator*, cloaked! He also picked up some readings of missiles loaded in the *Infiltrator*. All this was available because of a nearby thunderstorm, which disrupted the cloaking device.” Em Teedee continued without stopping, since because of droid’s lack of breathing it never needed to stop and take a breath.

“However this all happened, we can talk about it later,” said Luke. “We have an injured trainee who should talk to his parents soon.”

“We should *all* talk to our families soon,” commented Raynar. His own father had died from a plague created by one of Emperor Palpatine’s agents, while

trying to kill the Twi'lek Nola Tarkona who had released it. His name was Bornyan Thul, leader of Bornyan Trading Fleet, which was still a pro-New Republic trading cooperation.

“I think that’s a good idea, let’s go,” announced Luke. *I need time by myself to think this over, and I’ll take any excuse to get it. I’m not a young farm boy anymore, and I need rest, too.* He waved them on, and then said, “I’m going to have Ian, Growie, and Junnie come too.” *Boy, this is going to be one full comm center.* Luke ran across the stage to pick up Ian, Growie and Junnie in the medical center.

TO BE CONTINUED...