



THE DARTH SIDE

MEMOIRS OF A MONSTER

The journal of Darth Vader, Lord of the Sith and Servant to His
Excellency the Emperor Palpatine

As told by **Cheeseburger Brown**

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This document has been formatted by a trained monkey.

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A New Hope

It is a period of civil war. Guerrilla spaceships striking from a hidden base have won a narrow victory against our loyal Imperial forces, inflicting heavy losses in terms of casualties and, worse, the galactic peace. During the battle insurgent spies managed to steal secret plans to our ultimate weapon and the brainchild of Tarkin's dream, the DEATH STAR, an armoured space station with enough firepower to destroy an entire planet.

The whole thing has given me a massive headache.

Moff Nur has been killed, a wound in my life for which I shall never forgive the traitorous Rebel Alliance. Nur has been my closest confidant outside of my master for years, and I will feel his loss keenly. Our long conversations have always helped me clarify matters, though he was no mentor -- rather, a friend. Nur never told me what to think. He showed me how to find the answers myself.

I wish I could seek his counsel now.

The last time we spoke, right before the battle, he made a suggestion I admit I considered absurd. "You should try keeping a journal," he said.

"A journal?" I echoed. "Do you mean I should write a book?" I know, of course, that Moff Nur has been editing the manuscript of my master Darth Sidious the Emperor Palpatine, whose highly anticipated treatise on the subject of the subjugation of civilizations and the creation of powerful monsters promises to be a bestseller.

"No, no," smiled Nur. "I mean like a diary."

"Like a teenage girl?"

"Well, not entirely *unlike* a teenage girl, I suppose. The purpose is to help you analyze yourself by exporting your thoughts and impressions into a form you can review. Not only can it provide valuable insight as an artifact, but I find the actual process of recounting my reflections cathartic in itself."

"You do this?"

"I do. I promise you, my friend, it helps."

And so I have decided to make good on the Moff's advice, now that he is dead and the confidence of the terrorists swells. I have begun this journal. I do not know how long the experiment will last, but I admit that in the absence of Nur himself I do find it calming to imagine I am speaking to his spirit as I dictate this recording.

Hello, Moff!

Alright, now I feel really stupid. Perhaps this experiment *will* be short lived. I am a busy man. Being a preternaturally powerful dark overlord at the right hand of a descent-crushing Emperor entails a certain set of demanding responsibilities. The galaxy won't tyrannize itself, after all.

I'm back. Commodore Ozzel just rushed to my chambers to triumphantly announce in his simpering way that a series of terrorist transmissions has been intercepted originating

from the very starship that even now ostensibly ferries Ambassador Leia Organa on a consular mission to her homeworld of Alderaan.

Long have I suspected her ties to the Rebel Alliance! This time we have her. I have commanded this StarDestroyer to break off from the fleet and pursue the *Tantive IV* across hyperspace, and to disable her at the earliest opportunity.

With Organa's capture we will have a new hope for protecting Tarkin's plan, and restoring order to the galaxy...

My Two Suns

Busy day. Ambushing the insurgents over Tatooine. Surrounded by incompetence, blinded by the Force.

We captured the Rebel blockade runner *Tantive IV* in high orbit over the desert world of Tatooine, a planet with which I am...familiar. The Force radiates from its twin suns like the delta of a vast river, pouring out across the cosmos in strange, shifting, meandering paths that flicker and fork in response to history's unfolding. There is an unusual concentration of nodes of causality here, and I find their snaking glare oppressive. That is why I have ever avoided this world.

But business is business.

Whether by fate or accident this system creates an ideal camouflage for someone whose goal is to change the destiny of the galaxy, for the fleeting trails of probability that leap about their purpose are cloaked in the maelstrom of manifest possibility that shines here through space. Indeed, even as I strangled the Rebel captain I could barely discern his tortured spirit depart against the background noise.

I also confronted the master hypocrite behind the mission: the pretender-ambassador Leia Organa of Alderaan, lies ready on her lips even when her treason against the Empire is apparent. I am not fooled by this girl, though her particular recalcitrance inspires in me a bewildering ire. I had her sent away from me as quickly as possible, escorted to the StarDestroyer brig for transport to Coruscant.

The stolen plans were not found aboard the ship, but I believe they may have been smuggled in the company of droids down to the surface below. I have no explanation for the sudden and acute idiocy of the officer who let the escape pod go, but I have confidence that his sudden and acute death has inspired a new level of diligence on the part of his colleagues.

Despite this set-back I am optimistic. Where Tatooine was once a world beyond the borders of the Old Republic it is now firmly within the influence of the New Order. Stormtrooper platoons are now on the surface, securing the co-operation of the Hutts in their search efforts. With the help of their local agents I have confidence the plans will soon be in our hands.

There will be no one to stop us this time!

There's No Vader Like Darth Vader

Patience. The brown and copper globe of Tatooine turns beneath us.

The Force gnaws.

Today I find myself for the first time torn between taking my place before the bridge's array of ports meditating on the stars, or retiring to my hyperbaric chamber to remove my

masque and indulge in a different kind of meditation: this journal.

It is my habit to look into the outward deep for solace, but there is value in the inward deep, too. Perhaps I have finally grown enough to face what lies there, now that all that threatens us will presently be destroyed. Perhaps too these entries, these trivial detailings of my days, have sensitized me to an inner voice I could not perceive before...

When I did make an appearance on the bridge today the communications officer was speaking with a lieutenant planetside who reported tracking the two target droids to Jawas. "Orders, my Lord?" asked the communications officer, a veil of sweat glistening on his brow.

"Go to the Jawas. Twist their bodies until they scream all they know. Bring the droids to me."

He passed that on, and I wandered over to the viewports and clasped my hands behind my back. I closed my eyes and tried to find threads of meaning in the raging radiance of Force that ripples out from these suns, but I was interrupted from my meditations by a signal from the Emperor's office on Coruscant. "Will you take it here, my Lord?" asked Commodore Ozzel, hovering behind me.

"No. Route the call to my quarters, Commodore."

Looking disappointed that he wouldn't be in on Imperial gossip, Ozzel nodded curtly to the communications officer as I swept past him and into the lift. On the way down I considered how I would frame the events of the past few days in my report to my master. I found the elevator music irritating.

Once in my quarters I knelt upon the dais and the blue, translucent image of Darth Sidious took shape before me, his hood shadowing all but his thin lips. "What is your bidding, my master?" I said casually.

"Rise, my friend. Plans have changed. The Force canters around a vergeance."

"I have felt it, my master."

"You will escort Princess Leia directly to the Death Star and make her Tarkin's prisoner. There you will remain, until I call for you."

"Master? Will the Senate not demand a trial?"

Sidious smiled tightly. "The Senate will not be troubling us much longer. In today's session I will announce the permanent dissolution of the Senate in favour of our own Moff Council. Go now to the Death Star, my servant, and we will draw out this mystery from the Force."

I bowed. "As you wish."

And so we make now for our rendez-vous with Tarkin aboard the Death Star, just hours away. My master did not elaborate on how my presence there will serve to expose what flickers in the fabric of the Force, but his designs have always been his own. I can be patient. I will have my hour. He grooms this New Order so that one day I may assume the mantle of Emperor, and preside over a new era of prosperity and stability across the galaxy.

Thousands of years from now every waking babe will know the name Darth Vader.

I Hate Meetings

Arrived at the Death Star. Spent the day in meetings. I need a stiff drink.

Whether or not history appreciates the fact I am more than just a tyrannical dark overlord -- I'm also an engineer. So my first meeting upon stepping into the landing hangar from my shuttle was with the chiefs of all of the station's operational divisions, the victim of

long multimedia presentations from each department detailing their progress, expenditures, and time-table for task completion.

I fell asleep for a while, but nobody could tell because of my masque.

The bottom line is that, with the exception of one department, every system promises to be one hundred percent for tomorrow's big test. The chief of the errant division was apologetic, but I was unimpressed. He said, "We'll have the internal security sensors operational before the week is out, of that much I can assure you with nearly full confidence, Lord Vader."

"That is insufficient."

He shrugged and shook his head. "What can I say? Good, fast, or cheap: pick two."

I pointed my gloved hand at him and he began struggling for air. He clawed at his throat, his eyes bulging as he slid off his seat and hit the floor. He convulsed briefly before the final stillness. "You're fired," I said.

My next appointment was with Governor and Grand Moff Wilhuff Tarkin, the architect of the Emperor's vision to maximize the efficiency of our counter-revolutionary efforts by concentrating our displays of force in a few very extravagant symbolic acts rather than attempt to subdue a galaxy-spanning guerrilla network one world at a time. We simply do not have the time to grow the troops to do it. It was Moff Tarkin who pushed ahead the plans to build the prototype Geonosian Death Star almost twenty years ago, and it is Governor Tarkin now who plans to use this new Imperial Death Star to strike fear into the hearts of every anarchist in space.

Personally, I don't like him. But I admire him as a professional.

"Lord Vader, what a pleasure!" he grinned coldly as I entered his office. "Won't you sit down?"

"Wilhuff, how are you?" I asked, taking a seat as the tea service extended between us, steam rising from the pot.

"I understand you've caught Alderaan in an act of treason," he said airily, pouring the tea deftly. "Sugar?"

"Nothing for me right now," I said, looking around. "I can't take my masque off here."

"Ah yes," Tarkin conceded, raising one arched brow. "Of course, how silly of me. I am always forgetting to be mindful of your disability. Forgive me, my friend."

"Organa has been delivered to the brig. The Emperor wishes that I remain here, to oversee the successful testing of this battle-station."

Tarkin smiled again. "Wonderful. We do so enjoy having distinguished guests."

He sipped his tea and tried to maintain his composure as I flexed my mind and exerted a subtle pressure on his testicles. Pretending no discomfort he asked what other news the Emperor had. I told him about the dissolution of the Senate, which amused him greatly. He glanced at the chronometer and then asked that I accompany him to a meeting with the top brass before they were sent off with the Imperial Armada to hunt for the hidden base of the Rebel Alliance. I groaned inwardly, but had no choice but accept.

Predictably enough Commander Tagge was bleating on about how the leaked plans meant the terrorists had already won, and Admiral Motti was quacking the Tarkin party line about the unprecedented power of this new Death Star. Though I really should not be baited by such idiotic debate I found myself interjecting. "Don't be too proud of this technological terror you've constructed. The ability to destroy a planet is insignificant next to the power of the Force."

Motti became lippy so I choked him with my mind. Tarkin interfered before the

punchline, however, and Motti gained himself with a cough and pulled at his collar fretfully. Tarkin promised everyone that *I* would guarantee finding the Rebel base, flashing his toothy smile my way as his eyes remained fixed on the military commanders.

Tarkin then sat down and crossed his legs, finding his genitals inexplicably throbbing. The meeting broke up and I smiled to myself inside my masque.

I have retired now my temporary quarters here. The hyperbaric chamber leaves a lot to be desired, for which I blame Tarkin. My disability -- ha! One day I will know the pleasure of crushing his trachea with my mind, I swear.

I have tentatively scheduled the brutal interrogation of Leia Organa tomorrow afternoon, dependent on how the final systems test goes in the morning. Also, my office on Coruscant has beamed over a torrent of paperwork that requires my attention. We'll see how things pan out.

Who's That Girl?

Interrogating a strange spirit. Considering Tarkin's means and ends.

Things started out fine -- the automated interrogator hovered in and delivered Leia Organa a dose of truth serum, and then positioned itself above her head to attach the connections for the mind probe. I towered over the little girl and breathed, watching her courage falter. She struggled and grimaced as the probe combed through her thoughts.

We learned that the Royal House of Alderaan has smuggled three squadrons of used X-wing fighters into the hands of the Alliance, and has sent pilots to train the insurgents to fly them. We learned the Mon Calamari are plotting against the Empire. We learned that she has a secret addiction to ko-rock.

But we did not learn the location of the Rebel base.

Where things started to go wrong was when I abandoned the mind probe and attempted to search her thoughts personally. I put my hands on either side of her head and closed my eyes, pushing into her consciousness...

And all I saw was myself, reflected back at me. Her mind was a mirror. I do not know what to make of this.

When I reported to Tarkin he scoffed. He only believes in one form of persuasion: spectacular displays of merciless force. When we received word that this morning's tests had all been passed by every operational division he nodded to himself with grim joy and declared we should take the Death Star to Alderaan. I realized instantly his intention: a massacre such as the worlds have never known.

Tomorrow Alderaan burns, and its every soul with it.

I admit I am disturbed by the reality of the Death Star's mission. How many worlds will have to be immolated before there is enough fear to satisfy Tarkin? Is his real motive stability, or murder? The cold ribbon of determination I detect at the core of his thoughts is more like a droid than a man.

I am also disturbed by my experience with Leia Organa. I have never touched a mind and had it shake me so.

In a way she reminds me of someone I once knew.

Tightening Our Grip

A billion men died today.

And a billion women, and some six hundred thousand children. Millions of animals, uncountable trillions of insects, quadrillions of plants. The hot nickel core of Alderaan that had spun for the age of her sun came apart under the beam of the Death Star's superlaser, stretching outward to the crust and shattering it, continents and oceans alike boiled into space in a matter of hours.

Despite the Death Star receiving some damage from outflying debris, the affair was a resounding success.

I spent the whole day on holonet, giving interviews and answering questions at Tarkin's side. "This is the fate that will meet any planet that harbours terror," I declared to an audience of worlds. "You are either for galactic order, or against it. The Force is with us, and the Galactic Empire will prosper. Those who stand against it fight a losing battle."

Tarkin was jubilant with the success, and also his certainty that we have learned the location of the hidden Rebel base. I have my doubts about this. Leia Organa told him the base was on Dantooine, but I knew it was a lie. Tarkin, however, has enthusiastically dispatched Commander Tagge aboard a StarDestroyer to investigate the system. "I'm going to call my wife!" he grinned, striding away to his quarters.

I have returned to my quarters, too. I am listening to Brandelmor's Second Symphony, which has always soothed me when the Force is uneasy and transmits its anxiety to my spirit. Space reverberates with the tormented screams of Alderaan's departed. I keep turning up the music, but it doesn't help.

Darth Sidious always said the time of transition to the New Order would have rough patches, but I was not prepared for this. I cannot bear to think of them. I cannot bear to think at all.

My kingdom for a death-stick!

Damned Fool Idealistic Crusader

My former master is here, now.

Mood: muredtastic!

Tarkin was glowering, attempting to accept the fact that Leia Organa had lied about Dantooine, and Admiral Motti and I were trying to cheer him up. "Look at this," Motti said, pointing to the news-screen; "the Rangalorians have turned in their own Royal House for supporting the Alliance! The initiative is working, Grand Moff, just as you predicted!"

Tarkin nodded somberly. "That's a bit disappointing, really. I had hoped to destroy Rangalor."

That's when Lieutenant Cass reported that we had captured an armored Corellian freighter that matched the description of one that had blasted its way out of Mos Eisley on Tatooine. I rushed immediately to the hangar in order to perceive the tendrils of Force that might cling to ship directly.

The troopers claimed no one was aboard, including droids. I ordered a scanning crew and stood back to survey the battered vessel. The Force hummed, its filigree fingers dancing just beneath the surface of space. There was portent here. I could swear I could taste the spirit of my old master Obi-wan Kenobi in the air, and it sent a shiver down my spine.

I reported to Tarkin, who scoffed. He believes the gifted are extinct save myself and

my master, but this is because he is under the impression that a sensitivity to the Force is something that is *learned*. With the Jedi Order wiped out, Tarkin can see no way for new gifted to arise. As each moment passed I felt Obi-wan's presence with greater clarity, his mind broadcasting out to me from within the station.

He calls to me. He wishes to face me. Perhaps the fool thinks he can turn me, or even more foolishly, destroy me. When we last we met on Mustafar I was but the padawan, but now my powers have increased a hundredfold. Whatever that cunning old liar has in mind, there is but one fate he will meet: being struck down by my blade.

I go now to seek him out. I will write again once he is dead.

Destiny's Designs

The Palamush of Teraitut are an order of elite mathematicians whose common goal is to reduce the essential mechanisms of the universe into a finite set of algorithms, which may be applied to a body of statistical data in order to see through time.

Like the Jedi, they do not reproduce. They neuter themselves and seek new citizens from abroad, testing candidates with a series of esoteric questions that are reported to be "trivial" and "unilluminating" in the standard circles of Imperial academia.

In the days of the Old Republic the study of Palamush math was made illegal by edict of the Jedi Council. While on the one hand the Jedi denied that mathematics and the Force were related fields, they declared that Palamush experimentation had spiralled out of control after Teraitut detonated a star at the centre of a neighbouring uninhabited system simply by expressing the event with Palamusian Mechanics in a small portable computer.

Teraitut's official stance was that their mathematics had come to so closely resemble the mechanisms of the universe itself that its equations tended to actualize in real spacetime. The Jedi Council accused the government of Sithism, and drove the movement underground.

Emperor Palpatine has chosen not to overturn that particular edict. It stands as a lone vestige of the Old Republic in Imperial Law.

Never the less, I have been fascinated with the Palamush since I first learned of them from Moff Nur. For a low man he always demonstrated remarkable insight when it came to matters of curiosity into the ways of the universe. Nur argued that the key to breaking the loop of cyclical history was for the galaxy itself to become a more sophisticated entity. To supersede the weather of the wheel, we must become it.

He once showed me his prized possession: a forbidden Palamush Computer, the contraband of contraband. "You understand I put my life in your hands even showing you this," he said. "But I know you have a mind that yearns, my friend."

"This secret is safe with me."

He turned it on, and told me to place my left hand on the flat receptacle. He then tapped a few keys and turned a small knob. The computer made a brief buzzing noise, followed by the ding of a bell. I waited patiently while Nur's eyes flickered over the readout. A moment passed, and then another. He continued reading.

"So?" I prompted.

"Interesting..." he whispered.

"What?" I said. "Can I move my hand now?"

"Oh? Yes, yes of course." He leaned back and furrowed his brow. "Do you know what I see when I put my own hand in there?" I shook my head. He continued, "The

simulation is summed up in a single paragraph detailing the greatest consequence of my passage through this galaxy, which is apparently a re-orienting of the neutrino river that flows through the spoke in this arm of the galactic disc by a matter of a few parsecs.” He chuckled. “In a universe without me, one star fails to coalesce in the Outer Rim, a billion years from now. I’m a fairly consequential man, statistically speaking.”

“And mine?”

He cleared his throat and licked his lips. “According to this simulation, without *you*, dear Vader, this galaxy will be plunged into a hundred thousand years of barbarism and chaos, followed by a slow rebuilding of history.”

“So, the prophecy is true...”

“And, for some reason I cannot fathom, you also seem to be responsible for a fair amount of activity in an altogether remote galaxy, millions of years from now. Your destiny is indeed far flung. I’ve never seen anything like it.”

He came over and looked over his shoulder, but the readout was gibberish to me. “What else does it say?”

“This diagram represents a number of intersecting loops of biography -- it looks like you’re going to kill your teacher.”

“Sidious?” I exclaimed, incredulous.

“Did he cut off your legs?”

“No. That was...someone else.”

“Well, you’re going to kill whoever it was who cut off your legs. It looks like you’ve both saved one another lives numerous times, prior to that. Who is this man? You’ve never mentioned another teacher. Was he a Sith?”

I did not answer right away, and Nur sensed my reluctance. He pushed the gadget back into its alcove and walked back out to his lounge. “Let’s have another drink,” he suggested brightly.

“Obi-wan Kenobi,” I said, following him and sitting down on the sofa.

“The Jedi Knight?” he seemed impressed. “I knew you knew the Jedi ways, but I had not realized you had actually been a member of their order.” Something seemed to occur to him. “Do you mind if I ask, was His Excellency ever a member of the order?”

“He was not. But I was once a Jedi Knight, the same as Kenobi. I fought in the Clone Wars alongside him -- before he betrayed me, and betrayed the Republic.”

Nur smiled to himself and drained his drink. “All these years we’ve been friends, Vader, and only now do I learn the name beneath your title.” He reached out as if to shake my hand. “It’s a pleasure to finally meet you, Ana --”

“That name no longer has any meaning for me!” I interrupted with sudden vitriol.

“I didn’t mean to offend you,” Nur said quickly, withdrawing his hand. “Please forgive me, my friend.”

That was four years ago.

This afternoon I cut down Obi-wan Kenobi where he stood. We found each other in the corridors of this Death Star, and I met him with a lit blade. The duel was not long, for he was weak. Though he possessed an amazing strength in his wiry frame, he was slow and tired quickly. It was odd to see him that way -- thin, white-bearded, aged.

When I hesitated the spirit of Qui-gon whispered in my ear, urging me on.

It was strangely unsatisfying to cut my old master in half. His body disappeared, which was also fairly weird. Most disquieting of all was the shining joy his spirit radiated just before the death stroke.

The Corellian freighter *Millennium Falcon* escaped, but not before we had attached triple

redundant tracking systems. When I returned to the Death Star bridge Tarkin was happily watching a display describing the fleeing ship's trajectory. "The moment they exit hyperspace, we'll have them," he crooned.

I find myself in a reflective mood. I have retired to my quarters to speak these thoughts into my recorder in my hyperbaric chamber. Nur's computer knew that Obi-wan came here to die today -- did Obi-wan know? I think he did. I think I have played to his game, and I am uneasy.

Will my old master's spirit come to haunt me like the spirit of Qui-gon Jinn? I wish I could foresee the future as Darth Sidious does.

One day I will. I will be the most powerful Sith ever.

Yavin A Good Time?

Insane day! Ship to ship combat with Rebel scum. Death Star fall down go boom.

Mood: vexed and perplexed.

Admiral Motti has eaten his words so far as the invulnerability of our planet-smashing moon-sized battle-station goes. He ate his words as his head turned to a fine mist, carried away in the massive thermonuclear concussion that shattered the Death Star and killed everyone aboard.

I was in my TIE fighter at the time, fighting to regain control as I spun off into space after being ambushed by the blasted *Millennium Falcon* as I buzzed the surface of the Death Star picking off Rebel X-wings. I had been hot on the trail of one particular fighter, the pilot amazingly strong with the Force...

As I drew nearer I saw that lo and behold, the astromech droid embedded behind the cockpit was none other than R2-D2 himself. I took him out with my cannons, feeling the brief panic of the pilot and drawing strength from it. I bore down on his stern as he swung back and forth across the trench, dodging just ahead of my bolts with a power that was more than intuition.

I realized: he is gifted!

The Force blazed about the X-wing in a dance of glory. The pilot regained his focus and drove on, pulling away from my fighter and charging his torpedoes. I was lost in the dazzle when the Corellian freighter swooped out of from sunward and blindsided my escort, sending me careening away into space just moments before the battle-station detonated.

I found myself in orbit around Yavin IV, long ago a world of Sith culture but now an overgrown jungle apparently infested by the lice of the Rebellion. I watched their surviving fighters descend into the atmosphere, leaving burning trails in their wake.

The coded communications signal flashed. It was Commodore Ozzel aboard the *Scimitar*. "Lord Vader, are you unhurt?"

"Do not concern yourself with me, Commodore. What is the current position of the fleet?"

"We have are jumping to hyperspace bound for the Yavin System, my Lord, and are making for your position. We are conducting high resolution scans now, to determine your exact co-ordinates."

"The Rebel base is on the fourth moon. Bring *Executor* into orbit -- alert General Ghent to prepare for ground assault!"

"Sir -- yes sir!"

For fifteen hours I hung in orbit around the green marble of Yavin IV. The TIE

fighter's life support systems failed. It became cold but my own life support system increased heat to compensate. My every breath froze into a crystalline cloud as I exhaled, long, multi-spined freefall icicles growing from my masque.

At long last I spotted the massive spear of *Executor* looming over me flanked by a flotilla of StarDestroyers. A Tyderian shuttle dropped out of the belly of *Scimitar* and moved toward me even as the great bays of *Executor* opened to release General Ghent's drop-ships accompanied by a swarm of TIE fighters.

I fired the hatch and kicked myself out into space, grabbing the edges of the shuttle's airlock as I flew past, swinging myself around and then bracing against the hull. I knocked on the door and was admitted. After the lock cycled I stepped up to the cockpit. "I'll return you to the bridge immediately," promised the pilot.

"No. Take me down to the surface. Take me to the battle," I commanded, strapping myself in.

The pilot nodded and the shuttle's nose dropped to point at the jungle continents below, the air burning across our prow as we cut the atmosphere. Within moments we were speeding over the trees, approaching the clearing around the ruined Sith temples where Ghent's ATATs were already marching. "I don't know where to land," said the pilot.

"Do you see that flurry of laserblasts?" I asked.

"Yes, my Lord."

"Put me down right there."

The colour drained from his face but he did as he was ordered, swinging the shuttle down low in the munitions-shadow created by one of the walkers. I vaulted from the hatch and hit the ground running, my lightsabre already ignited in my hand, casting a red glow across the grass.

The plains shook with the mighty footfalls of the walkers behind me, and shuddered from the blasts of their cannons as the front lines of the Rebel defense were smashed asunder. I never slackened in my pace as I sprinted across the first series of foxholes, decapitating the terrified soldiers as I passed.

I landed on a command platform and with one pinwheeling flip sliced every officer cleanly in two, my lightsabre humming and singing.

I checked behind me: the walkers were advancing and a line of ground troops were marching double-time toward my position. Platoons were being picked off by eruptions from two stationary ion cannons at the front of the temple, so I made my priority dodging their fire as I charged into the stone mezzanine and struck down every Rebel I saw, deflecting their blaster shots to kill those fleeing to the higher balconies.

I dashed after them and found myself rounding a corner into an ambush, a wall of insurgents positioned behind blocks of rubble and targeting me all at once. I leapt backward and turned in air, landing in a rocky niche like a bat. By the time they had tracked me and fired again I had run along the wall and dropped down behind them. The two closest to me had their tracheas crushed as I swept my sabre behind my back to lop the hands off two others. I pushed past them as they screamed, and ran down the corridor they defended. I glanced behind me and saw the rest of them fall under an avalanche of white-armoured stormtroopers.

I emerged into a hangar, where the last of the Rebels were hastily piling into their ships and firing their afterburners. I jumped on the wing of one fighter as it hovered toward the open air, smashing the cockpit canopy with my fist and crushing the pilot's skull in my hand. He slumped over his controls and the X-wing veered into the wall, its nose folding with a screech of rent metal.

I jumped down and spun around, looking for my next target. That's when a laser bolt flashed out of the shadows and hit me squarely in my left knee, tearing apart the circuitry there with a pop of sparks. I hit the ground hard.

I saw my attacker dash across the hangar and jump into the last X-wing, and I felt the Force ripple around him like a stone in a stream. I tried to stand but fell again. The fighter lifted off the floor and swooped away, its pink thrusters glowing fiercely as it accelerated into the sky, dodging blasts from the walkers.

Silence descended, interrupted only by the occasional faint explosion from outside. I dragged myself over to one of the ruined fighters and pried a long piece of metal from the wing, which I fashioned into a kind of cane so that I could bear my own weight. In this way I shuffled out of the temple, feeling like Yoda, my left calf dragging behind me.

On the plains the battle had ended, and the ruins of many Rebel speeders and one ATAT lay smoking in the grass amid the bodies. Stormtrooper platoons were ferrying the injured to the infirmary. An Imperial major jogged up to me and saluted. "Lord Vader, General Ghent has been killed. The Rebels are attempting to flee the system, and the fleet reports they have been ambushed by Mon Calamari warships. Several Rebel vessels have already escaped to hyperspace. Your orders, my Lord?"

"Ignore the frigates. Capture every snub fighter possible, especially X-wing class. I want the pilots alive."

"Immediately, my Lord," he said crisply, opening his commlink and relaying my directives. "This is Major Veers: Lord Vader commands the capture of all Rebel snub-fighters. Let the frigates go. I repeat: let the frigates go. Take the fighter pilots prisoner and hold them for Lord Vader."

I nodded. "Very good, Major."

A pair of stormtroopers came and helped me to my shuttle. I am on my way now to the Super-StarDestroyer *Executor*, to first seek repairs for my smashed leg and then to question the prisoners. If I am lucky, one of the captured pilots may even be the one I seek.

Cat's In The Cradle And The Silver Spoon

I must apologize. To myself, I suppose. It has been such a very long time I have last made an entry in this journal. Been very busy, lots on my mind.

I will never forget the feeling that overtook me when the tortured Rebel pilot screamed out the name of the "hero" who destroyed Tarkin's Death Star. After days of my personal attentions he had been reduced to a shell of a man. Hairless, disfigured, hunched, quivering, stammering, inhuman -- he closed his eyes and screeched: "*Skywalker! Dantooine!*"

"We have already been to Dantooine, you lying Rebel scum," shouted the interrogator. I put my hand on his arm, and signalled silence.

"What was that name again?" I asked.

"*Skywalker! Luke Skywalker!*" the creature croaked.

Luke...the name of Shmi's father. The coincidence was too great. There may be a lot of people named Skywalker in this galaxy, but not too many insurgents bearing obscure nomadic-trader given names. I knew at once the truth: *she* may have died in childbirth, but the baby had survived. It was a boy, and now he was almost a man.

He is my son. And the Force is strong with him.

Upon my return to Coruscant I knelt before my master Darth Sidious in the Imperial Palace, and found myself reporting everything that had transpired *except* for what I had

learned about the pilot responsible for ending the Death Star. “We can build new Death Stars,” said Sidious, flexing his fingers before him. “The silencing of Alderaan will reverberate for years to come.”

“I appreciate your forgiveness,” I said.

“Do not misunderstand me,” he enunciated crisply. “You have failed, my servant. Your compulsion to face Obi-wan Kenobi distracted you from the essence of events, and blinded you to the living Force.”

“Yes, my master.”

“Now matters are worse,” he sighed. “I had foreseen the end of the Rebellion through the Death Star, and now that destiny lies in tatters. I shall have to redesign my trap, with a new Death Star. I shall start over, to erase the stink of your incompetence in this matter.”

“I will redeem your confidence, my master, I swear it.”

“So it indeed shall be,” he agreed. “Your sole purpose in this world is now to hunt down the Rebel Alliance. Find them, and together we will eradicate their scourge and bring order to the galaxy.”

“As you wish,” I replied, bowing again and taking my leave.

Now I am aboard *Executor* in my chambers, reviewing intelligence reports pouring in from my sinister agents across the galaxy. I spent hours reading the Imperial library profiles of the pirate Han Solo, and the farmer Owen Lars. I learned that Mon Mothma has fled the capital and openly joined the Alliance. I investigated leads pointing to Vaspar, Dantooine, Ord Mantell...

The galaxy is wide, but I will find them. I will twist the bones of every terrorist leader until they give up young Skywalker. I will prepare for my ascension to the throne by using one fell stroke to both destroy the Rebellion and gain a gifted apprentice. My purpose is clear to me.

The Rebel Alliance may have won some meagre victories against the galactic peace, but make no mistake: the Empire strikes back.

My Sinister Agents Have Failed Me Again

Typical day at work. Rebel Alliance remains at large.

I feel uneasy, but I do not wonder why.

My spirit is not calm.

Tonight I have excused myself from the technical debrief of yesterday’s assault on Vaspar, opting instead to remain on the bridge meditating on the stars. The Force brings to me every whisper of the officers as they wonder at my state. Can any of them know what it is like?

They cannot. Their tour of service does not allow for marriage, or even private property beyond the materiel assigned them by the New Order. Even the eldest of them are children, in this respect, for their experience is limited to a world of men’s camaraderie, soldiers’ celebrations and Imperial discipline.

They could never know what it is like to find out you still have a son, a stranger to you, lost amid the squalid systems of the outer rim and counted as a hero by your enemies.

Tomorrow I may strangle General Veers.

New Probe Droids

Quiet day. Jumping the fleet toward the core.

The *Executor* and the rest of the Imperial armada have been recalled to Coruscant, in order that we may be equipped with the latest development in hunter-scanner probe droid technology from the factories of Geonosis. I am reluctant to accept this hiatus in our quest to uncover the hidden base of the Rebel Alliance, as I just received word that one of my bounty hunters has sighted the deserter and renegade Han Solo in the Ord Mantell system.

Despite this reluctance, I must obey my master.

My hatred for Solo is unique, and my feelings stem not only from our encounter in battle during the recent terrorist attack on the Death Star, but also my suspicion that it was he who orchestrated the escape of Princess Leia Organa and subsequent delivery of the stolen plans to the rebels at Yavin.

Of course, my son was with him. On the Death Star, and at Yavin. Though Fett did not say so, I wonder whether my son was with him at Ord Mantell, too.

Solo!

I will have my vengeance.

And Me, With A Pain In All The Diodes Down My Left Side

Getting some “me time.” Mood: melancholy.

We have arrived at Coruscant, and I have retired to the Imperial Palace. I stand at my balcony and meditate on the sky, mad whorls of cloud pierced by endless lines of speeders. The constance of their hum is insectile, and reminds me of the sand crickets back home.

From below, the towers reach up like fingers, trying to touch the glowing underbellies of the clouds.

There is no world like Coruscant.

Tomorrow I will be summoned to my master’s chambers to report to him our progress. I am uncertain whether I should bother to relate the lead from Fett at Ord Mantell until the chase provides more fruit. My loathing for the cowardly deserter and rag-tag terrorist Han Solo may be clouding my judgement. I must meditate on the matter longer.

On a more banal note something has gone wrong with my left leg. For the time being I have avoided limping by overriding the control circuitry with the power of the force, but this is needlessly draining. I have called for a repair droid, but it has been over an hour and there is still no sign.

Later, I will find the man responsible for dispatching the repair droids and crush his trachea with my mind. I also have tentative lunch plans with General Krelcon and his people, possibly in the Corellian quarter.

Lunch Surprise

I will say this for being a tyrannical dark overlord: you get great service at restaurants.

The Centerpoint Station Grill is located in the south-west quadrant of Coruscant’s Corellian quarter, overlooking the Selonia tramway platform. My transport arrived early due to unusually light traffic. The restaurant staff encouraged my aides and I to sit down in a private room, but I preferred to await the general’s party in the open air of the square, criss-

crossed by the fleeting shadows of the lines of buzzing traffic above.

It is not the sort of thing people think about, but I do not get many opportunities to see any living world at the level of the street. I see worlds from balconies, from shuttles, through the reinforced windows of Imperial garrisons...

Sometimes it just feels good to get a little warm sun on my helmet.

The restaurant staff attempted to service us in the square, proffering exotic waters, wine and the best flavoured wafers from Jablim. They bowed low, and I spoke to their scalps. "Nothing right now," I said. The pedestrians cut a wide swath around us, making sure their feet did not touch my long shadow.

After a quarter of an hour I demanded, "What is the meaning of this delay?" and my aides scrambled to stuff communicators into their ears to make inquiries.

"Lord Vader, General Krelcon's office is not responding to our hails," they informed me.

"Curious," I said. And then the Centerpoint Station Grill exploded.

When the smoke cleared I saw that my aides had been reduced to a mewling, bleeding puddle at my feet. I stepped over them and waded into the debris. Chunks of masonry and flaming tapestry rained down on every side. A legion of stormtroopers rushed in around me, pawing at the bodies with their rifles. Their commanding officer jogged up beside me. "Lord Vader, are you unharmed?"

"Do not concern yourself, Commander. I want to know who was behind this."

"My patrol picked up the ignition signal, my lord. We believe it may have been a rebel code, though it was parasited on an Imperial transmission."

"Bring me General Krelcon: I want him alive," I ordered. The commander nodded without question and retired from the smoky ruin, covering his mouth and nose with the top of his tunic.

I surveyed the carnage around me with disdain. Freedom fighters, indeed!

Haste Makes Waste

Bloody interrogation. Imperial audience. More leg woes.

Did you ever have one of those days?

It can be challenging to maintain your dignity as a dark tyrannical overlord when the circuitry in your left leg constantly misfires, threatening to send you off on a mad pirouette without notice. It requires a serious effort of will to maintain my poise, the tendrils of my connection to the Force reaching deep into space to feel out my distant quarry and at the same time wrapped around the mechanisms of my own body to keep them working.

I am stretched too thin.

The traitorous dog Krelcon was captured early this morning and brought around to the Imperial palace after breakfast. I had poached eggs with ham, buttered crumpets and a glass of wetfruit juice.

During my interview with Krelcon he admitted to me that he had been involved in smuggling the stolen data tapes of the Death Star's technical readout to the Rebel Alliance. In order to produce similarly fruitful results I used the Force to crush all of the small bones in his hands. Krelcon became most chatty then, and we discussed likely locations of the hidden rebel base.

Things went badly after that point, however. I confess that Krelcon took me off guard when he mentioned the prophecy. Eyes burning in a masque of pulp and blood he screamed,

“The son of the suns is nigh, knight-bastard! *He is on your very threshold!*”

I had meant to backhand him but my passions were aroused and my concentration faltered, and so instead I released control of my errant left leg and instantly found myself doing a frenzied, lop-sided jig that turned me in place.

Krelcon found the strength to laugh. Thus, with one powerful thrust of the Force I burst his skull.

Which was probably premature. But *que sera, sera*.

The upshot is that the subject of Krelcon dominated my audience with His Excellency the Galactic Emperor, deflecting from the knot of emotion I feel inside whenever I consider the matter of the rogue Han Solo being spotted at Ord Mantell, possibly in the company of my son.

My son! I wince to even think the word, for truly he is not my son but the son of a name I no longer acknowledge. A different man, a weaker man, an insubstantial shadow of the king I have become.

“You will return the fleet to the outer rim tomorrow,” enunciated Emperor Palpatine crisply, leaning into his cane and watching me from beneath the hem of his black mantle.

“You will soon have the clues you need to close in on our quarry.”

“You believe the new probe droids will be effective, then, my master?”

“I am not concerned with droids,” he replied. “Rather, I have foreseen these events. The strings of the Force grow taut, and soon we shall play a tune upon them, Lord Vader. It will be a dirge for the rebellion that will initiate the second age of this New Order.”

Man, that guy loves the sound of his own voice! Luckily no one can see me roll my eyes behind this masque.

Emperor Palpatine lowered himself into his throne and lay his claw-like hands upon the wings ceremoniously. “Tell me,” he commanded evenly. “Does something else trouble you, my servant?”

“No, my master.”

His yellow eyes pierced me for a long moment. “Very well,” he concluded. “You have your instructions. Report to me when the hidden base is found.”

“Yes, my master.”

He turned his throne to meditate on the endlessly roiling cityscape of Coruscant, the principal sun melting into the horizon in a haze of violet and gold. I took my leave, my left leg skittering randomly every few steps in my fluster.

The Crimson Guard pretended not to notice.

Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner

Dinner with the officers. My shameful token.

The core is behind us. The fleet makes for the rim.

I do not eat with my men, but sometimes I am obliged to join their table. I preside over them tonight as we jump from the jewel of Coruscant to the thin dust of the outer arms. My presence reassures them that this mission is not yet another in an endless series of fruitless quests but rather the certain charge to the rebels’ doom.

“This time we’ll have them,” crooned Admiral Ozzel, signalling the boy for more wine. “I have assurances from Geonosis these new probe droids can ferret out even shielded energy signs.”

“That in and of itself is not new,” pointed out Captain Piett gently. “The key is their

operation as a swarm. It's the network efficiency that is ruthless."

Like most lower men they cling to their technological marvels, when the real quest will be won by cultivating a sensitivity of the spirit. With the droids as my long fingers I will channel my search along them, feeling out for that hated, burning ripple in the fabric of the Force: the Rebel Alliance!

"It's inevitable," Ozzel scoffed. "Efficient droids only hasten the process. How can they imagine they can stand against us?" He chuckled and drained his cup. "Wouldn't you agree, my Lord?"

"Their doom has been foreseen," I said.

The fool Ozzel grinned, while the others nodded respectfully and then tipped their cups. "To the Empire," added Piett, and the company agreed.

Later, in my chamber I kicked back and had the droids remove my masque. I listened to Chasto's Third Symphony and for reasons I do not fully understand it moved me to weep. I destroyed the audiophonic system with a nod, and it fizzled with a groan and a whisp of smoke.

"Take care of that when you have finished with my leg," I told the repair droid kneeling before me, his instrument penetrating my calf and exploring the faulty circuitry there.

When the droid left I opened the small compartment on my chest where I keep my token of her. Every time I take it out to hold it I vow it will be the last time, and that I will crush it in my fist when I have found my peace. But that peace comes only nine tenths of the way and I find myself closing the compartment, the token once again esconsed inside.

It is so stupid.

It is just a japor snippet that was carved a long time ago. Part of a necklace that was dashed from her neck, before the choke.

It all happened to someone else! I close my fist to crush it, but I have already put it safely away.

My weakness makes me sick. Does my master suspect my failure?

I Am Surrounded By Idiots

Short entry today. Full schedule. Deploying killer probe droids across the galaxy.

You know what I hate? Idiots.

What I do not understand is why they do not understand that the only way for lower men to maintain any kind of dignity at all is to *respect their own limitations*. Humility is a virtue, if you are low.

In my meditations I have found myself drawn toward a remote sector, one not yet scheduled for probe deployment. Something speaks to me out of the velvet between the stars, and I cannot ignore it. "Redesign for the Themoth Sector," I commanded. "Make ready the jump to hyperspace."

"But Lord Vader," whinnied Admiral Ozzel, "the armada is already moving along a prescribed route..."

I withered him with a stare, my hands on my belt.

He ordered the helm to replot our course, and notified the fleet commanders. Then he turned and asked as contritely as he could manage, "May I at least know what leads you to suspect Themoth will yield results, my Lord?"

"You may ask," I told him, turning away to the glass. "As an ant may ask the sun why

it shines. It is beyond you, Admiral. See to your duty.”

Ozzel hesitated. “Sir,” he said crisply and turned on heel.

Do you want to know what the worst part is? My left leg is *still* on the fritz. Whose trachea do you have to crush with your mind to get a little service around here?

That’s So Wizard!

The probe droids have detected an *illegal settlement*.

Mood: optimistastic!

There is a bit of bounce in my step today, notwithstanding the fact that all the diodes down the left side of my leg seem finally to be functioning smoothly. I ate a full breakfast in my hyperbaric chamber while listening to really loud music (Qui’hut Xillermott’s Sonata No.26) and then popped out to tour the bridge.

Admiral Ozzel rushed up to me, that officious little face of his trembling to contain a vulgar jubilation. “Lord Vader, we’ve found something!”

I followed Ozzel into the pit to survey the screen myself. In the Ison Corridor, by a bright star called Anoat, there circled a smaller star called Beshpin circled in turn by a fat and many mooned gas giant. According to the probe droid a ring of habitable air lay nestled in the layers of the giant, and this ring was littered with scattered unchartered settlements.

“Pirates, drifters, dunces,” I declared shortly. “Who cares where they cling? I sense nothing here.”

“My Lord,” interjected Captain Pielt quietly, appearing at my elbow. “Consider this.” He pointed out a larger settlement whose energy signs suggested industrial levels of activity. “The rebels could be re-building their fleet, after their losses at Yavin,” he said.

Admiral Ozzel nodded primly. “Quite right, Captain.”

I put my hands on my belt and surveyed the unblinking stars outside the array of viewports. I reached out with the Force, and *there it was*: a node of connection, ever so faint, ever so distant. I nodded to myself and turned back to the officers.

“We shall move on Beshpin,” I declared.

The bridge crew rushed to their consoles to do my bidding. The stars outside drew out into lines and were swallowed by the swirling etherspace of travel. Inside my masque, nobody could see me smiling.

I clutched my hands behind my back and meditated.

There Goes The Neighbourhood

One of these days, one of these days, Ozzel: bang, pow! Straight to the moon.

A pall of incompetence muddies a qualified success.

The Super-StarDestroyer *Executor* emerged from hyperspace amid a volley of escaping ships: pirate junks and blockade runners swarming out of Beshpin like rats from a sinking ship. “We’ve been detected!” exclaimed Admiral Ozzel thoughtfully.

I looked at him for a long, dark moment. But his attention remained fixed on the viewports.

“Pick them off,” I told the commander at the targeting console. “Fire at will.”

Bolts blazed across the face of the great pink gas giant, the fleeing jalopies shattering in a series of little flashes. Captain Pielt arrived at my side and saluted. “M’lord, we have

established communications with the settlement. They claim to be a mining colony. Our close range scans show technology consistent with that claim.” He added, “They beg us not to attack.”

I nodded slowly, lost in a trance. I closed my eyes and sought out the node in the net of the Force I had so faintly detected two days ago, and it was *still there*...down below, in the clouds of Bespin. There was significance there, there was meaning there, trembling just beneath the surface. I would seize it!

“Prepare my shuttle and an armed escort. I will see this mining colony for myself.”

“But Lord Vader, what if it’s a rebel trap?” bleated Admiral Ozzel, his moustache twitching.

“Leave that to me.”

It was not a rebel trap. It was a mining colony. A non-unionized, untaxed mining colony catering to the underworld: Hutts and primitives, scoundrels and libertarians. The administrator of the facility was a quaking fool in expensive fabrics, introduced as Lando Calrissian.

I took one look at his satin shirt and disco hair and I knew he was a weak specimen, and would prove easy to bend to my will. He tried to smile while he bartered for his life, and I picked through his jellied mind at my leisure. His smile faltered. “Lord Vader, with all respect, what is it you want from us?”

“I don’t know,” I told him, rising from my chair. “But you will soon find out.”

I have a feeling this man Calrissian has a role to play yet.

Back aboard *Executor* I retired to the bridge to meditate on the stars. And that is when the new signal came in from the probe droid network: a power generation system spotted on a world of ice, just one sector away.

The Force sang to me with such strength I feared I would lose my balance. Thankfully my left leg has continued to work smoothly despite recent difficulties and so I was able to maintain my composure.

For the moment Calrissian is forgotten: the fleet moves on Hoth!

Bedtime Story

I would like to tell you a little story. This goes out to all those bleeding heart hippies out there who sympathize with the rebellion.

Once there was a star called Trime around which circled three habitable worlds. In the founding days of the Old Republic the Trimean worlds had enjoyed great prosperity as centres of learning and artistic innovation, but they fell into ruin over a centuries-long battle concerning where the Royal House of Trime should summer.

When the Prince of Yor moved the House to sit on Trime Secundae after being disgusted by the perceived commercial excesses of Trime Primae, Trime Tertiae launched a trade war against both worlds accusing them of a cultural conspiracy to rob them of their own rightful dignity in the system, and sought to forcibly move the royals in the name of defending the shared Trimean heritage. The journalists had a field day, and were subsequently disappeared in the night by secret police. Things went from bad to worse.

The Royal House itself was fractured, with one faction of nobles pitted against another in bloody Moebius-strips of double-dipped connivance. They broke ancient treaties by putting the primitives to work in mines, stoking the fires of their war engines. There were revolts, strikes, slaughters.

A long line of Old Republic ambassadors followed by an equally long line of Imperial negotiators had treated with the Trimean Councils, but any solution was ultimately stymied by a question of dividing that which was indivisible: the seat of the Crown on Calendar Day.

So my master sent me to the Trime System. This is going back a ways now, maybe fourteen years. At any rate, I listened to the councillors on each world, and met with the sheriffs of the guerilla armies. I even spoke briefly with the chief of a clan of warrior primitives -- little pink things with googly eyes and prehensile tails.

What crystallized the situation for me was something the Duke of Foulbash said, bringing his brown fist down on the table: "Lord Vader, what is at stake here is a millennium of tradition! That is the heart of this matter."

The Duke was right. I told him so. Then I assassinated the entire royal family, down to the last forgotten bastard.

And do you know what? The Trime System is a leading commercial concern in the sector today. They grieved but they got over it. Once liberated from the yoke of an insoluble, deeply emotional dilemma the people of the Trimean worlds were free to build new bonds, to establish vibrant new institutions, and to create new traditions.

Question: do you want a moment of agony, or an entire history of ache?

That is the spirit that underlies the New Order. Understand this, and live in peace.

It's Christmas On Hoth

Big day. Storming the rebel ice fortress.

Took a nap first so I would be peppy. Leg feels pretty good.

Admiral Ozzel took the fleet out of hyperspace too close to Hoth, and the Rebel Alliance were -- you guessed it -- alerted to our approach. The cornerstone of Ozzel's arrogance is his insistence that rebel technology is so vastly inferior to Imperial technology that we need broker no caution.

This attitude is typical of a man who could not rephrase his own fusion orb if his life depended on it. He cannot fathom what rebel engineers may accomplish out of desperation. People who are good with things, people like me, can appreciate the infinite diversity of possible tools buried in artful combinations of even the humblest technologies. Give me an hour to reconfigure an industrial grade repulsolift and I will give you an ion cannon and enough parts left over to build a droid to run it.

Ozzel just isn't the creative type.

The problem is solved now, however. I crushed his trachea with my mind, and promoted Piett to command the fleet. I have transmitted to following note to Ozzel's kin:

Dear House of Ozzel,

I regret to inform you that your son has been killed in the line of duty.

He was an incompetent, yammering boob and he will be missed by none. I have allowed the men to pillage his personal belongings, which is why we have enclosed nothing but the sole remaining item: a torn advertisements page from a magazine of midget pornography. May it shock and disturb you, and may you think of it always when you remember your dearly departed son, the ninny.

Know also that his limitations as a sub-par military professional caused the deaths of many of the Emperor's loyal soldiers, whose funeral expenses will appear on your next tax assessment.

Sincerely,

D. Vader

Too harsh? I call them as I see them.

At any rate, the attack on the hidden rebel base began and I had General Veers mount a ground assault. Once his walkers had destroyed the rebel generator I made planetfall and personally supervised our incursion into the base. I must say that the stormtroopers' new heavy weather gear makes them look very cool. Hats off to Palpatine. (Most people don't know this but His Excellency designs all of our outerwear personally; he has a real flair for geometry, and a great sense of line.)

Due to Ozzel's bungling we arrived too late, and the lion's share of the rebel terrorists had already escaped. I could feel the presence of my son, but he was not at the base. The good news is that as I came into the rebel landing bay I saw the renegade Han Solo escorting the traitor Leia Organa aboard the same Corellian freighter that we captured them in last year. And do you know who else was with them? C-3P0!

Talk about a blast from the past!

The tendrils of the Force swam around them, and as the troopers positioned their cannons I closed my eyes. In the darkness behind my eyelids I could see the diaphanous fingers of the Force dance around their spirits as they fled, lazy loops of bifurcating destiny falling behind them like smoke.

I opened my eyes to see the freighter rocket away. "Ready my shuttle. Inform the fleet to close the net."

I am on my way back up to *Executor* now. Everything I had conjectured is true, and the bond between them is indeed strong. Within hours the *Millennium Falcon* will be in our hangar, and Han Solo's pain will sing out to my son.

Calgon, Take Me Away

Darth Vader and the stinking, rotten, terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

Do you ever have one of those days where you find yourself asking, "Hey, I know I'm bad, but what did I do to deserve *this*?"

Have I mentioned before that I am surrounded by idiots? Let me cut to chase and just tell you up front: the rebels got away. *All* of them. General Veers, bless his heart, must have destroyed two dozen armed speeders and an entire line of infantry -- but those were just ants. We failed to take Mothma, Organa, Rieekan, Skywalker or even the traitorous fish Ackbar.

You might be thinking some fruit would come of our ensnaring the *Millennium Falcon* as it fled Hoth. You would be a damned fool optimist. My elite squadron of StarDestroyers proved itself utterly incapable of a securing a single unescorted freighter travelling less than the speed of light.

I mean, come *on*.

I've seen *drills* that were more challenging. And yet, they escape. I have worked among these men this past generation and I have always known them to be, with only a few notable exceptions, truly outstanding military professionals. A galaxy quails before them because they are efficient, effective and keen.

...You try to be an effective manager, you weed out the bad apples like the late Admiral Ozzel -- only to find that an insidious culture of incompetence has somehow transformed your deadly pan-galactic armada into a fleet of spaceballs.

To demonstrate a more appropriate level of Imperial resolve I have commanded all wings to follow the freighter through Hoth's asteroid belt. We are sustaining massive losses

due to asteroid impacts and subsequent complications, but I feel confident that this will serve as an important object lesson to the surviving staff.

Let the Force sort out who is to live and who is to die. I know *my* destiny does not lie here.

The Wind Beneath My Wings

I am going to tell you a secret.

I want to tell you who my hero is. At risk of treason I confess that it is not my master, Sidious, whom you call Palpatine. And it is certainly not Obi-wan Kenobi, the righteous fool who should have been like a father to me, but could not bring himself to be that strong. But Master Qui-gon Jinn could. He was taken from me before I even got a chance to really know him. Despite this, I loved him.

Qui-gon used the Force to see what was wrong with things, and then set them straight as cleanly as he could. He was decisive, and he was quick. He knew what he needed to do and he brokered no guff from anyone about it.

When I met him I thought to myself, “This is exactly how I have dreamed a Jedi Knight to be.”

He was pure. He had no relations with either women or men. He ate no meat, and he barely slept. He drank only water and wine. The Force swirled around him like a cape, and when I closed my eyes I could see the figures it described burning against the darkness of my eyelids.

I think I thought he was a god. I know I thought he would be my dad.

But Obi-wan was too weak to defend him when it counted, and Qui-gon died.

Obi-wan was a pretender to the role of Qui-gon’s son, just as he would later play at being the father of my son. Obi-wan was slippery, bondless, secretive, cunning. Nobody says these things about him, but I *know*. I lived with him for *years*. So many of the things he did were *just not fair*.

Hold on. I need a death-stick.

I am back. Where was I? Oh yes, Obi-wan...

When the moment came to strike down Obi-wan, I hesitated. I am still not quite sure why. But the ghost of Qui-gon whispered to me, and told me what to do. *Kill him!*

So I did it.

Up yours, Obi-wan Kenobi. You will never pretend at anything again. You hid from me the one truly beautiful thing I have ever made: a baby boy. And you have corrupted him with your lies. (At least the green worm Yoda is dead. For this I am grateful. Trained as Jedi young Skywalker shall not be. Ha!)

Meanwhile, the search for the elusive *Millennium Falcon* in the asteroid field has yielded no results. The whole affair has put me in a sour mood. Can you tell?

Forget it. I am going to return to the bridge to shatter asteroids with my mind. I find it soothing, and the officers really get a kick out of it.

Collect Call From Coruscant

Holy Force! I don’t know what to say.

I spoke with His Excellency today, and my world has come upsidown.

To put things in perspective: I was *surprised* when in a galaxy where all the gifted have been slain I found myself chasing down a snub fighter that I could barely see, lost in whorls of shimmering probability as loops of Force played over it. I was *very surprised* and chagrined when my Death Star was destroyed by its pilot, a callow youth. In the months that followed I pursued the Rebel Alliance around the galaxy, and so did my sinister agents. Their intelligence eventually bore fruit: they told me the name of the youth was Luke Skywalker, and I was *shocked*.

That is when I first started experiencing the malfunction in my left leg. I nearly fell over. *Luke Skywalker?*

I became obsessed with finding young Skywalker. We redoubled our forces, and when Emperor Palpatine asked why I told him I had reason to suspect the hidden rebel base would soon be in our grasp. In other words I lied. To *my master*. My quest became less the search for the Alliance and more the search for a single man.

Why did I allow my judgement to become so twisted? I gave myself twenty lashes before I was certain: I wanted in some way to love him. It made me sick to think about. Love is a path of meat, where the Sith is the path of the mind. I had rejected my old identity -- it had burned from me, hanging from my body in sizzling cobs.

There is no such man as Anakin Skywalker!

(And yet, there is such a man as his son.)

This is all leading up to something. Stay with me here. The point is that I did not know what I wanted with Skywalker, exactly. Perhaps I wanted *him* to tell *me*. Perhaps I would just kill him, and thereby simplify the relationship. I would certainly kill Han Solo, and anyone else who had been his mentor in terror. But the point is that I was disturbed by the existence of Luke and I wanted, above all, to end the disturbance. By whatever means.

And today Emperor Palpatine, whom I know as my master Darth Sidious, calls. I wonder: do I dare unleash a cloud of obfuscation against my own master's vision? Do I dare speak before him *without* one to hide my uncertainty?

I knelt on the dais and sought strength from the void. The transmission phased in.

And do you know what the first thing is to pop out of the old man's mouth? I graduated from *shocked* to *flummoxed* when he said there is a great disturbance in the Force, and at the centre of it all is Luke blasted Skywalker. Inside my masque, my jaw dropped. The cloud of obfuscation I had been generating fell away and diffused. *He knows!*

Here is where it got really weird: I heard the words coming out of my own mouth as if I were in a dream: "He could be a...powerful ally."

My master, Darth Sidious, furrowed his ancient brow and nodded. And agreed.

So here I am now, back in my hyperbaric chamber, feeling totally stunned. My master has just handed me a way in which I can love my son: turned to the dark side as my *protege*. We could serve the Empire together.

I would not dare to even dream this had it not come from my master's lips. I cannot explain to you the thoughts I no longer feel ashamed to entertain since I am no longer hiding Luke's identity from him.

We could rule the galaxy together, as father and son!

And I could love again.

Scar Friends Luncheon Circle

Lunch with Fett. Piett's new boy.

The noose tightens.

Boba Fett is one of the few people with whom I will share a meal. He was horribly disfigured by acid years ago, and I feel we hold a bond in common in that respect. He has never so much as winced at the ghastly noises that come through my ventilator while I chew, because he is a gentleman.

He is also a bounty hunter, which is why I have invited him over to chat.

"They won't leave this sector," he assured me as he sprinkled hot sauce on his vegetables. "That freighter can't be jacked out of a prang this time -- Captain Solo will limp someplace safe to lick his wounds."

"And you know where that will be?" I asked, drawing in some meat through a straw.

Fett gave me a level look. "That's *my* hard yakka, Lord Vader."

"The contract is yours. You know the other bounty hunters will find nothing."

He nodded slowly, returning his attention to the meal. "They'll swim for Bespin, my Lord, to have a smoko with a gas-cocky called Calrissian. He and Solo go back yonks."

Calrissian! I knew the Force did not orbit him for no reason. To Fett I said, "Excellent, Boba. You will be rewarded handsomely. By the way, your scars are looking quite good."

"I've been using a new cream," he told me.

I did my famous corpse of Mace Windu imitation, which made Fett snort wine through his nose. "This party's over," I quipped, and Fett howled. Long ago Windu was First Speaker of the Jedi High Council, a fierce warrior who slew Boba's father and tried to kill my master. In vain, of course. These days the Emperor uses Windu's purple light-sabre to trim his hedges.

We understand one another, Fett and I, and so we share a certain mutual regard. When all of the bounty hunters are assembled on the bridge we pretend no special relation. Should Boba Fett gain a reputation as a man of the Empire he would lose the trust of the Hutts.

Captain Needa of the StarDestroyer *Avenger* found and then lost the *Millennium Falcon* again. The good captain subsequently lost consciousness. Whether or not he finds it again is not my concern. The bounty hunters have been dispatched, and the fleet moves on to Anoat to await Fett's signal.

Also, Admiral Piett seems to have a new boy. I don't know what happened to the old one, but I am fairly certain I did not kill him. At any rate I came upon the two of them in the pit this morning and Piett seemed somewhat sheepish. "This is my new yeoman, m'Lord," he said too brightly. "Yeoman Broderick, Lord Vader."

"M'lord," whispered Broderick.

"Getting younger all the time, aren't they?" I asked Piett.

He smiled tightly. "Sir," he said.

Does It Hurt When I Go Like This?

At the top of my game. Capturing Cloud City. Breaking Solo's will.

The signal from Boba Fett came in the early morning, and we took the fleet to Bespin. Shadowed by the girth of the gas giant the armada's sensitive sensor network marked the approach of the rebel freighter. Admiral Piett contacted me down in Cloud City: "M'lord,

the *Millennium Falcon* has entered the system.”

“Very good.” I turned to face the metrosexual city administrator as he strained to appear at ease, sweat running down his brow in a constant, beading film. “Calrissian: escort Captain Solo and his party to the dining hall first thing in the morning.”

“Yes, Lord Vader,” he said quietly, eyes on the floor.

“I warn you, Calrissian -- do not fail me,” I told him, “or your people will suffer while you watch. And listen.”

Calrissian did not fail. He delivered unto me Han Solo, Leia Organa, old C-3P0 and a wookiee. Then he threw up. I had Veers put each of the captives into separate cells, except for the droid whom a stormtrooper had already incapacitated.

For the primitive our programme was simplest: he was bombarded aurally with frequencies that cause his race great physical pain, and encoded into the screeches and sirens were profane descriptions of his mother’s licentiousness in the vulgar speech of Kashyyyk. He howled and hollered, beating his hairy fists against the walls and his own head. Though crude, the signals he sent were strong. His tortured heart involuntarily called out to all who loved him, and I knew my son was among them.

Check.

Leia Organa of Alderaan presented a unique challenge. In our encounters before she has always impressed me with the strength of her will, and her tolerance of corporeal pain. She has a quality of sharp pride and easy beauty about her that affects me, and I confess it is because she reminds of me *her*. As with *her*, I can never penetrate the obfuscating light that clouds her mind from me. Her spirit burns so fiercely that it is blinding, even though she does not have truck with the Force.

I entered her cell and stood over her, breathing.

“What do you want with us?” she demanded.

I made no reply, but advanced a step toward the chair where she was bound.

“I won’t tell you anything,” she swore.

My respirator clicking, I advanced again and patiently held my place, my lenses fixed on her eyes. She started to speak again but it caught in her throat, and she drew back against her bonds.

I put in her mind the image of Coruscant burning, the sky black with debris and the oil of broiled flesh. Hammered by my hatred, I blasted her mind with this picture of abject chaos and loss.

Startled, horrified, bewildered, her mind sang out in reflexive misery.

Check.

I nodded to myself with satisfaction and then made my way to the cell containing the estimable rogue Captain Han Solo, whom my men had secured to an angled platform facing an intimidating array of glowing and buzzing interview tools. I signalled to the commanding trooper and he toggled the control that tilted Solo toward the bristling bank of tongue-loosening hardware.

Solo stole furtive looks at me again and again. He expected questions. I chuckled and signalled for the trooper to stop. “What do you want?” asked Solo through gritted teeth.

“Only your pain,” I said.

“I’ve been waiting for this for a long time,” he went on. “Gettin’ a chance to talk, just you and me. You wanna know why?”

“Pray tell, Captain.”

“*I know who you are!*” he shouted.

Though my masque betrayed nothing I was startled. Did Luke *know* about me? I knew

the liar Obi-wan would never have told him the truth...but could this smuggler know to tell him? How could that be possible?

"You can't hide it from me any more!" Solo continued. "Your cruelty reveals everything, *Lord Vader*."

"So, you know the truth..." I said, suddenly afflicted with a pain in the control circuitry of my left leg.

"Yeah, I know alright," spat Solo. "*You're my father!*"

It took me a moment to absorb that. Then I shook my head and smiled behind my masque. "No Solo," I pronounced darkly. "I *killed* your father."

Solo winced as if I had struck him. "That's not true," he muttered. "That's *impossible*." Check.

I waved my hand dismissively and nodded to the trooper to commence the physical torture. The probes began to spark. Solo groaned and screamed behind me as I left the cell to confer with Calrissian and Fett outside. Both of them were whiney, but they could not burst my bubble.

The trap is set, and the ripples of his friends' pain are travelling outward, backwards and forwards through time, touching my son even before the event has taken place. I feel that Skywalker is already on his way. Soon he will arrive, and I will tell him everything.

I am walking on sunshine.

I Hate Waiting

Awaiting the arrival of Skywalker. A personal moment.

My words yesterday about Leia Organa got me to thinking. Specifically, I was thinking about the way I referred to *her* as *her*. Am I so weak that I cannot bring myself to pronounce *her* name?

Her name was Padme Naberrie. And she was my wife.

Do you know what I liked best about her? It was not her laugh, or her tresses, or her even her kisses: it was the fire that lit in her eyes when she was angry. That fire told you who you were dealing with: not a mere mortal, but someone who would bring rain to deserts if it suited her. A stubborn godlet, in a girl's frame. Her spirit shone so vividly I could never read her mind for all the glare.

And she had this amazing power of dignity that meant that no matter how much someone might underestimate her initially, after the first few words out of her mouth they were forced to take her seriously.

People *never* took *me* that seriously. (I mean, they do now -- but not then.) I had to kill people to get them to take me seriously.

They say I killed her, that I killed Padme. But it is not true. I choked her, yes, but it was childbirth that took her. The Force traded Padme for Luke, the boy who now races to this city to rescue his friends. As he draws nearer the strings of the Force hum in anticipation, new nodes of causality blooming at the intersections of its interstellar strands...

I will reach out to him.

As I reached out to Obi-wan Kenobi and was denied, and left to burn, I shall reach out to take Luke's hand when he is fallen before me. I will have in abundance what no one had for me: mercy, forgiveness, understanding, trust.

When I close my eyes the sky is alight with the whorls of the Force, coalescing here around this city in the clouds. How can I doubt the truth I have divined? Luke will join me.

It is his destiny.

I Don't Know If It's Art, But I Know What I Like

Human science experiments. A meditation on sculpture.

Today we put Captain Solo into the carbon freezing chamber, in order to test the system before capturing Luke Skywalker for delivery to my master, Sidious, on Coruscant. Everything went swimmingly -- the punk smuggler was put into perfect stasis. And people question the merits of human experimentation!

Captain Solo's body was half-visible, fused in mid-emergence from the face of the carbon brick. He was frozen in a cry of agony, hands grasping like claws, pelvis turned.

It made a beautiful sculpture. A perfect captured moment of a man in bondage, his heart blackened by hopelessness and pain.

It really spoke to me. Made me feel weird.

The worst of it is that his friends will try to rescue him, no matter how fruitless the attempt. They will die trying to save him. He will stay in that block of carbonite, reaching out forever until they come. And they *will try*.

I have felt Skywalker as he landed at this city, just moments ago...

"Well, I'm off to the wop-wops," said Boba Fett genially as he stood beside me in the carbon freeze chamber. He was looking forward to his reward from the Hutts. "Crash hot kai they have on Tatooine," he said with relish. I had no idea what he was talking about so I just nodded. In front of the prisoners and the men I bid him farewell formally and he escorted Solo's carbon prison away. "Bounty hunter," I said with a small bow.

Calrissian balked when I ordered him to take Leia Organa and the wookiee to my shuttle, but I could steer his mind with my pinky. It does not require much concentration to puppeteer fools.

...Though I admit my mind is now focused on my son. He is here!

Gotta go.

Parenting 101

Okay, I admit it. I cut off the kid's hand. Everything went downhill after that.

Blast! Blast! Blast! I am *such* an idiot.

I surveilled my son as he walked through the city, my eyes closed, my back to the security monitors. His spirit danced and rained, his emotions farting out bright, flickering clouds of micro-causal flotsam in every direction. Lumbering arcs of probability swung around him in sick, drunken orbits, any one of them threatening to actualize at a sneeze.

Quite a lightshow, really. People who cannot see the Force have no idea what they are missing.

I was able to discern that the callow youth's undisciplined powers were being channeled into a keen signal by the famous blue astromech droid R2-D2, whose ability to manipulate or be manipulated by the Force is something I have never understood. Whether he is some kind of midichloric instrument or mechanical *idiot savant*, it cannot be ignored that his presence aids the boy.

So the first thing I did was separate them, by sealing a fire door between them.

Skywalker himself I teased through a maze of corridors into the bowels of this city,

dangling a shadow of my presence before his nose like a carrot. I studied his mind, and found his first thoughts were not of his friends: it was only me he sought now. The Force called to him, I reasoned. Or perhaps the ghost of Kenobi whispered in his ear.

I meditated in the carbon freezing chamber as Skywalker approached. Out of the steam strode Qui-gon Jinn, shimmering and insubstantial. “Anakin,” he called. “The time has come to test him.”

“He is only a boy.”

“He is stronger than you think,” Qui-gon pronounced, and vanished.

So...chalk one up for Qui-gon. The boy is strong. Stronger than I could have imagined. Through his clumsy, novice staggers the Force blew enormous rage, a hot wind of raw power I struggled to hold my own against. I had toyed with him at first, but I soon found myself working hard. He knew none of the classic moves: his foil play was dictated directly from his heart, clubbing at me with an instinctive passion that dodged my every stratagem.

And, of course, my left leg was acting up like crazy.

I used what ounce of my will I could spare to exert control over the misfiring circuits, wrestling my wayward limb to do my bidding as I fended off the broad, single-minded thrusts of the bitchfire youth. He knocked me down and I felt his confidence swell. I realized: he loathes me!

I escalated my own level of brutality, and he lost ground. Still I found place to wonder: what fires his naked hatred? This is not the sting of a political idealist.

He popped out of the carbon chamber before I could freeze him, which was a neat trick. The duel ranged. I threw objects at him with my mind, which was obviously beyond his ken as he reacted by trying to dodge them like a low man. Then I blew him through a window.

It went on and on.

He didn't even want to *talk* about the power of the dark side.

And then it happened: down on the catwalk as we clashed again and he struck me with his sabre, glancing my shoulder. He struck me, and I just lost my cool -- without really thinking it through I lopped off his hand. Little bugger!

He was as raw as he was going to get, though he exerted an impressive will to keep his fear from boiling over. As he crawled away from me across the catwalk I figured I had nothing to lose. It's time to spill the beans. It's now or never. I took a deep breath: “Luke, Obi-wan never told you what happened to your father...”

He screamed and jibbered, clinging over a chasm fathoms deep. His pain moved me. And not in the usual good way. I mean I felt for him. So I did as I said I would: I reached out to him. I told him we could be in it *together*, come what may.

Luke jumped to his peril.

The Force is strong with him, however, and he survived his fall. I felt him call out with his mind, and watched the fabric of the Force contort as the *Millennium Falcon* piloted by the escaped prisoner Leia Organa and the surprisingly slippery Lando Calrissian abandoned its flight, returning to Cloud City to rescue Skywalker.

I returned aboard *Executor* and waited to snare the freighter as it stalled in space, unable to jump away due to a sabotaged hyperdrive (ha, ha). As the ship climbed out of Bespin's gravity-well I let my mind play out along the filigree ladders of the Force until my tendril found him, honing in on the corporeal pain of his severed arm and the throb of his psychic wounds. Luke's spirit squirmed away from my connection, burned by the truth. But I could see that he was strong enough to face it, his resolve hardened but uncracked. Impressive. Most impressive.

The crippled freighter sailed into my view from the bridge, crossing the crescent of Bespin and making for black space. In moments we would have them!

“This will be a day long remembered,” I said.

...Which is pretty much when the *Millennium Falcon* escaped to hyperspace.

I sighed. Why me?

I was even too dispirited to crush Admiral Piett’s trachea.

Now I am in my hyperbaric chamber, listening to music (Rotan’s Sonata for Holotyne) and trying to get a grip on things. Betrayed by a mimbo, surrounded by incompetence, my soul in knots; lost Skywalker, lost Organa, sold Solo...

The Emperor is going to barf when I tell him.

For Shmi

When will fools learn that the Empire always strikes back?

Also, reflections on my mother.

Mood: somber.

The StarDestroyer *Avenger* has broken from the fleet, and makes for Coruscant. Aboard *Executor* Admiral Piett commands the hunt for the newest hiding place of the destructive Rebel Alliance, while I am returning home to report to my master, the emperor of this galaxy and a master lord of the Sith. He is...unhappy about recent developments in the whole son-of-Skywalker business and, though I am not privy to the reasons, he was *extremely* put out that I failed to bring him Leia Organa.

“I underestimated her importance to you,” I said as I knelt before my master’s flickering holograph. “My failure is indeed complete.”

“Your blindness in the matter redeems your fealty,” he whispered, fondling the head of his imaged cane as his imaged eyes gazed down upon it. “It is not a significant issue, my friend. Not. Significant. At all.”

And indeed, now that I think about it, it *isn’t* all that significant. Perhaps I did undervalue the importance of relaying the known rebel spy Organa to Coruscant, obsessed as I have been with confronting my son. No doubt it is this obsession about which my master wishes to question me in person. Matters of the gifted come before the affairs of low men, as His Excellency himself reminded me when he admitted Organa to be insignificant.

“Chin up, Lord Vader,” my master continued. “The Empire will strike back, and that pitiful pocket of anarchists will be stamped out forever.”

“But master, in my son they may have a new hope for the return of the Jedi.”

“Enough of this,” grunted Darth Sidious, waving his gnarled hand dismissively. “We will speak of Skywalker when you come before me on Coruscant. Make haste for the core, my servant.”

“Yes, my master.”

The transmission ended, and I have remained ensconced in my guest chambers aboard *Avenger* ever since, staring out the port-holes with my hands clasped behind my back, meditating on the shining stars and pin-prick worlds and the unholy voids that separate them.

My thoughts have ranged to my mother.

She was born to merchants, hard-working but prosperous, plying the lanes of space for their daily bread and legendary fortune if it could be found. Nomadic for generations, the Skywalkers were renowned for panning the galactic rim for the rarest artifacts and most

delightful primitive curiosities, eking a living selling wholesale to the Corellians who made a killing re-selling their wares in the core.

In the days of the Old Republic the tentacles of a corrupt federation came to ensnare every trade route of every civilized system, pressing even the once mighty Corellians into the margins. Individual tribes of merchant-nomads like the Skywalkers had no chance. They were pushed further and further into the periphery, forced to buy and sell in the smaller, dirtier, meaner markets of the outer rim -- Tatooine, Dantooine, Terminus...

The greatest force in their universe became the gangster Hutts, jealous gods on whose appeasement rode the success or failure of entire franchises. But hard times meant bribes went unpaid, and the Skywalkers' ships were beset upon by pirate raiders. The pirates stole their cargoes, their virgins and their children. My mother, Shmi, was a girl of seven years when she was kidnapped, ferried away in conditions unfit for beasts, and eventually sold in a Hutttese market to the highest depraved bidder.

Some masters were kind, and others were cruel. She came to Tatooine and worked beneath the twin suns. When she became "inexplicably" pregnant she was sold for less than her weight in meat, from Gardulla the Hutt to Watto, a Toydarian junkman with a soft heart despite a hard tongue.

And I was born.

"Two for the price of one! How do you like that?" is what my mother says Watto yelled out to everyone who came by the shop that day. Then he slapped my mother's ass and reminded the men of her impressive flexibility. "Fifty oldster-standard nuggets for an hour, hah? Good bargain, hah? Smile for the nice men Shmi."

And she would. She would smile. My mother could always smile. She smiled as she died in my arms.

I just wanted to say thank you. Thanks, mom. You took an unbearable burden and gladly made it heavier so that I could stay innocent as long as possible. You made every sacrifice in the hopes of wresting for me a better life -- unhesitant, unflinching, without regret. You never once questioned that the underlying force that holds people together is love, even when you all you knew was suffering.

I love you. I still do. Even now. I still think of you. Every day.

Keep On Darthin' In The Free World

Been a while since my last entry. Lots of catching up to do.

Also, I have a brand new leg.

I do not know by what means these transmissions reach you, but if you have experienced a long hiatus on your end it is because I have been exceedingly busy lately. That is no real excuse, I know, especially since I have found speaking my thoughts into this journal so very cathartic. I apologize, and swear no such lapse will come again, as long as I shall live.

I am aboard the StarDestroyer *Avenger*, en route to the outlands of Mordell at the galactic rim -- but I started my morning on Coruscant. I was having my morning tea when the new girl came through to tell me the Emperor commanded my presence at the palace.

"Is your breakfast quite satisfactory, Lord Vader?" she asked.

It was not, but we shall let her next of kin worry about that.

Despite the light rain I elected to walk rather than take a transport, in no small part because I wanted to give my new left leg a bit of a go. It is *such* a relief to finally have good

circuitry in place after suffering so long with that enigmatic malfunction that threatened to cause my calf to spontaneously jig if I let my attention wander. Now I feel whole again. Were it not for the necessity of maintaining an appropriate level of Imperial decorum I think I might have kicked up and clapped my heels.

My master, the Dark Lord Sidious and the Emperor called Palpatine, was also in a jaunty mood. The rain ran down the wide windows of his offices, drawing undulating sheets of translucent shadows that slithered across the floor toward the throne. “Yes, come in my friend!” called Sidious, rotating his chair away from the cityscape.

“What is your bidding, my master?” I asked, and then I noticed the Bothan nailed to the wall. “I did not know you had a guest,” I added.

“Ah yes,” cackled Sidious with a grin, “my Bothan friend and I have been discussing the location of the massing point for the Rebel Armada.” He took his cane and walked over to the wall where his furry visitor hung. “It has been most enlightening,” he enunciated crisply. The Bothan moaned.

“Splendid,” I said. “Then I can resume my hunt?”

“Not yet, Lord Vader,” sighed my master, shaking his wizened head beneath his cowl. “There remains yet one duty I bid you perform...”

And so my master appointed me the task of overseeing the final phases of activating the armaments of the New Order’s greatest work of engineering: a new DEATH STAR, ten times more powerful than the first, a glorious rebirth of Tarkin’s dream. (And this time we’ve built it without the need for a vulnerable secondary thermal exhaust port, right below the main port.) His Excellency demands that the weapons systems be fully operational even before the superstructure has completed construction, for reasons that remain his own.

It is not mine to wonder. I must obey my master.

Besides, I have always enjoyed engineering. I look forward to accomplishing the impossible, to the shock and awe of the low men. Mark my words: the first thing that snaggle-toothed moron Moff Jerjerrod will say is that it cannot be done. He will ask for more men. And then he will soil himself when I tell him the Emperor is due to arrive on Friday.

The richness of life is found in the small pleasures.

Vader’s Pastorale

Dull day. Arrived at Endor. Made Moff Jerjerrod cry.

My quarters aboard the new Death Star are quite satisfactory. The smooth and precise action of the robotics in the hyperbaric chamber are beyond reproach: I had barely sat down before it had neatly divested me of my masque and slaved my life-support systems into the host recharger. Also, I have a really spectacular view -- three large triangular ports that look out upon the green and white face of the Sanctuary Moon, the bright sun cantering shadows across the verdant mountains and pillarous cloudscares while the silver crescent of Endor itself marches in stately orbit behind.

There is something exhilarating about so much life. It is at once inspiring and daunting, and a part of me quails at its chaotic splendor and wishes for the homeliness of a wasted world like Tatooine.

But where there is life there is the Force. Life nourishes it, causes it to grow. It is in the crannies of life’s microscopic machinery that the computer of the universe reaches its greatest calculatory density: the probable fates multiply a millionfold, and reality itself ripples

in anticipation. A thousand times beneath the perception of low men, the fabric of space quivers at the touch of even a microbe.

When I close my eyes I can see the song this world describes in the webs of the Force, uncountable infinitesimal tendrils coalescing into a great hollow orb that rides beneath this station, pinwheeling through space about the white light and black chute of the galactic fulcrum.

To wit, to wank: I enjoy the view.

Tomorrow I will oversee the testing of this Death Star's new weapons systems. Since things have fallen so woefully behind schedule I anticipate crushing not a few tracheas. Shape up or sputter to the floor unconscious -- that's my motto.

Blasted Contractors!

Work is a disaster. The blind leading the blind leading the Force-choked.

Cracking the whip. Setting a new tone of efficacy around the Death Star.

Due to the haste with which we are proceeding through the latter phases of this battle-station's construction we have been forced to employ scores of civilian contractors from across the galaxy in addition to our own Imperial Corps of Engineers. This had led to a certain clash of working cultures.

For instance, this morning I critiqued a tragically sub-par piece of workmanship on a tractor-beam repulsolift inversion assembly by snapping the neck of the site supervisor and throwing his limp corpse down a disused elevator shaft.

Imperial engineers would have snapped to crisp attention, of course, but all these civilian contractors did was give me was grief. "Oy, you do that again and I'll have the union on you!" barked one red-faced buffoon.

"It is vital that you enhance the inter-departmental synergies of your operation," I said. And then I killed him.

On a more positive note the world-smashing superlaser seems to be working admirably, much to the relief of the stress-incontinent Moff Jerjerrod (and the relief of his cleaning service). The lower ranks now giggle when he enters the room, whispering about yesterday's chat in the landing hangar in which Jerjerrod greeted the news of Emperor Palpatine's imminent inspection by losing control of his bowels. Though no one let on at the time, you knew they had to be smelling it. It was certain they not be able to hold off on the jokes for long, since Fett's penchant for toilet humour is famous and every cloned trooper is a reflection of that spirit.

After destroying one of Endor's lesser moons I treated the men to a round of Corellian wine. Admiral Piett signalled from *Executor* that the moon has been completely incinerated, reducing the likelihood of damage from the kind of outflying debris we saw when we toasted Alderaan. The safety control officer was tickled pink.

Tomorrow I have elected to take a tour of the facilities on the forest moon below. My office is packing a picnic.

Ewok Cook-Out

Touring the forest moon. Getting back to nature. Singing around the bonfire.

Wondering whither Luke Skywalker. Musings on my reign to come.

I have spent the day touring our facilities on the Sanctuary Moon from which we emit the invisible energy-condom that protects the still incomplete Death Star orbiting above. This world is an explosion of life, every inch teeming with creeping vines and scurrying insects and rustling leaves. Our tour ended up at the stormtrooper garrison where General Veers was hosting a barbecue.

"Have you tried one of these Ewoks, m'lord?" asked Admiral Piett, offering me a crisp kebab. "Delectable!"

Veers himself was surrounded by a cadre of identical troopers holding their helmets in one hand and their drinks in the other. "Lord Vader!" Veers greeted me. "I'm so glad you could join us. Did somebody get you an Ewok?"

"I'm fine, just fine," I assured him. "Your forces seem to be in excellent shape, General."

"Thank you, my Lord," he smiled. "Have you met Lieutenant Twenty-Six? He's responsible for the new drills we've been using to tighten up the scout platoons."

"How do you do?" I said, shaking the cloned trooper's hand briefly. He nodded respectfully. To Veers I quipped, "How do you tell them apart?"

Everyone had a good laugh over that.

While the men kibbitzed I took a stroll through the nearby glen. I cannot remember the smell of the world anymore, but with my boots stepping through the bracken underbrush and with the dappled sunlight playing over my helmet I can almost fathom what it was like to know scent.

Twigs snapped and I paused. Animals were about -- animals with minds. When I closed my eyes I could discern their wispy spirits sparkling behind the glow of the thoughtless canopy. They had smelled the meat of their kin and it set their hearts racing, dreaming of revenge. But they scampered before my shadow. I moved on, pushing through the bush.

I came to a rise overlooking a shallow ravine in which was situated the auxiliary entrance to the shield generator bunker. I considered: why a back door?

When I returned to the clearing I asked General Veers about it. "The Emperor specified it," he told me. "As you can see, my Lord, the auxiliary entrance lies just to the west of that rocky cache. His Excellency has commanded me to station a legion of walkers behind the ridge at all times..."

"Go on, General."

"Loath as I am to speculate, my Lord, I can only assume the Emperor is baiting a trap for rebel spies."

The General may be on to something, for there is movement in the Force. Even now I sense a restlessness in the galaxy, a yearning of hyperspace to eject matters on our very threshold. I meditated on this growing disturbance as the men stuck a fresh Ewok on the spit and lowered it over the fire.

"Doesn't that smell great?" whistled Lieutenant 26.

The sun set and the party became more boisterous. Several of the men took turns leading the others in rounds of song. I declined when asked, but made a special request for the classic popular anthem *Burn, Rebel, Burn* which they took up with enthusiasm. In listening to the lyric carefully I developed a theory that the song may in fact be ironic, but I am a bad judge of such things: from my point of view *most* popular music these days seems to be a joke on its audience.

"Where's Moff Jerjerrod?" I asked.

"Back on the Death Star crying because no one invited him," chuckled Admiral Piett,

his arm around his new yeoman.

“Does *nobody* like that guy?”

General Veers shook his head emphatically and everybody laughed. I knew where they were coming from. The man is annoying. If the Emperor himself had not forbidden me from crushing Jerjerrod’s trachea with my mind I can assure you today’s barbecue would also have been a merry wake.

The air was alive with the chirping of insects.

I looked upon the bonfire blazing into the forest night and felt a shiver run down my spine and into my cybernetics, though I know not why...

Now I have returned to the Death Star to finalize preparations for arrival tomorrow of my master Darth Sidious. I know he blinds me to his designs in the affairs that the Force tells me are threatening to unfurl here at Endor, and it makes me feel so very alone. Can it be that yet another man who has pretended at being a father forsakes me?

I am too willing to stand in another man’s shadow, to win his approval.

Tomorrow I shall pierce his fog with my focused vision when he comes here. I shall know his mind and yet mine will remain a placid pond to him, the mirror surface giving no hint of what eddies churn within.

Too long have I been the learner. I must now prepare myself for my future, when *I* am the Dark Master. I cannot afford to be negative -- I have to *know* Luke will turn. He *will* come to study the Sith way from me. It is the only interpretation of the prophecy that makes sense!

Though I have devotedly worked for his love and bowed to his reign, I admit to you I will smile when Palpatine dies. My whole life I have waited to stop being somebody’s padawan.

I am ready for bed. I have to stop journaling. Big day tomorrow. And yet...I sense something -- a perturbation in the Force I have not felt since...

Deep in space, I feel the strings of the Force grow taut. The Emperor is not the only gifted one traveling to this moon. There is another. Skywalker!

They come together to clash, and thereby make me Emperor.

Soon this will be Darth Vader’s galaxy, and the people will willingly raise statues of my gargoyle face in celebration of an era of stability and order like no other the worlds have ever known.

In anticipation of portraiture, I applied a fair gob of Boba Fett’s new skin cream before I clapped off the light and lay down to sleep, the air whistling soothingly through the ventilators of my hyperbaric chamber.

The Tao Of Sith

Big day. Receiving the Emperor. Ruminations on the Sith mission statement.

My master, the Dark Lord Sidious, Most Excellent Emperor of the known galaxy Palpatine, has arrived at Endor. Amid only minor pomp and circumstance he debarked from his shuttle and I escorted him to his tower where he has now retired to recuperate from his journey and align himself with the local Force.

It was he who broached the subject of Luke Skywalker. I felt his presence slither among my thoughts and I held my consciousness stock still, repulsed by his cold probe but powerless to resist him. He knows my thoughts dwell on my son. He knows I yearn to take up my post aboard *Executor* and resume the chase.

And yet he denied it me.

My master's thoughts are an impenetrable miasma to me now, but for a shallow gloss of ritual trivia he maintains like a wig over his true mind. It has not always been this way.

I am no fool. I know he has cast a cloud of obfuscation between us.

Does he prepare himself for death? He is ill, and I tell you this in the strictest confidence. He is gravely ill, he has confessed this to me. This is why turning Skywalker is so vital: who better to be my dark padawan, when my master has been released from this plane?

"You were conceived by the galaxy, my friend," Palpatine has told me. "You are of it, and the immaterial part of you is bound inextricably with the fate of it. Your blood carries the will of the Force, as surely as if it were written in a book."

I am indispensable to the galaxy, but my master is not. He knows this to be true and has accepted it into his heart, for the way of the Sith commands an unflinching communion with pain. "There can only be two," he has reminded me. "When destiny reveals your apprentice, I shall be slain. I am but an instrument in this affair."

And yet, I find myself wondering about my master sometimes. What kind of man did it take to covertly apprentice oneself to the Force, and then engineer a rise to total power? Beyond the guidance of the way of the Sith, what kind of a man does it take to *begin* such an undertaking?

About Palpatine's childhood on Naboo I know nothing. The archives have been purged. How he escaped the eyes of the Jedi examiners is a mystery. But somehow his gifts remained his secret. By Korriban he learned the way. He had the strength of spirit to look into the darkness and come away alive. By the stewardship of Plagueis he came to know the power of the dark side...

Wait a moment. Do you even *know* the difference between the light side and dark side of the Force?

It must be understood that the Force is, above all, singular. The so-called "sides" arise from differing matters of *perspective*. (If you study the way of the Sith you will find that many of the truths we cling to depend entirely on one's point of view.)

The opposite of the singular Force is the all-encompassing void of death. Time began with the Force, and will end in desolation. This is the way of things, and an inevitable consequence of the flow of events from the past into the future.

Without the inertia of the fall toward the abyss, the Force would have nowhere to go.

For in the chaotic tumble toward doom the stuff of the worlds enact loops of complexity that change the grade from life to death, introducing valleys, peaks and cycles. Between creation and destruction comes a flutter of improbability, a brief sonnet of meaning against the noise of time. Life!

It is the causal contagion that ties every ounce of us together through the network of the Force, our actions resonating against our almost-actions and our non-actions in a web of fleeting possibility that spans this galaxy and beyond. The beat of a child's heart detonates supernovae, the beat of a bug's wing tilts the orbit of worlds.

We are all connected.

Anyone who awakens to the Force knows this. The divisive issue is what to do with this knowledge.

When you can run the mechanism of the universe forward or backward, scrubbing through possible histories with a thought, a theme develops. You cannot escape it. Death, death, death. It is the final destiny of all things, great or small, matter or idea. But there is astounding beauty in the arts of the not-death, the filigree dances of life's loops as it spins from light to void. If you are human, it moves you.

It *should* move you. But this is what the Jedi Order denies. They preach that the heart of a beast cannot judge the destiny of a galaxy. They preach dispassion and detachment, a condescending *compassion* for the damned. They stand by the sidelines and watch history happen, intervening only in trivia that offends their effete sensibilities.

Every Jedi knew the cycles of civilization, and every Jedi knew an age of barbarism was nigh. *And yet they did nothing.*

In contrast, the way of the Sith is predicated on a love for man. We have inherited the godhead of the galaxy by colonizing its every world. Though lesser species might have flourished given infinite time, it was our kind who got there first. We have won this galaxy with thousands of generations of our blood and our dreams. We call the others “primitives” because *we are their kings.*

And we will not sit idly by as it all careens toward a morbid interregnum. Inspired by our passions we will act to bridge the gulf between civilizations, shortening the period of disorder by decisively maintaining connections between societies from one side of the galaxy to the other. We will weather the storm.

Hate! Love! Misery! Joy! *These* are paths to the dark side, for to invest in the emotional life of civilization is to care about its fate. To care is to suffer, and suffering is *real.*

The Jedi were mere spectators.

They jabbered amongst themselves as a committee, no one of them wielding enough power to see through my master’s veil, their light resting on the shoulders of three. In contrast by the Sith way the Force is gathered and concentrated in a single individual, making him a catalyst for vision. With Jedi arts a gifted one can see the next moment -- with Sith arts a gifted one can read the decade. The Force is focused through my master so that I might by way of his preternatural alignment also brightly see the many forked face of destiny.

Because of this the Dark One traditionally exhibits a bewildering confluence of humility and potency -- the bleak peace of one who has seen the endless doom at the end of time and returned with an oath to steer life well.

Though I wonder lately about my master’s humility. How long has it been since he has gazed into the naked face of the Force, and how arrogant has he become in the while? Could he scheme to live forever, as Xizor claimed? Could he truly have forgotten that the prophecy is about *me*?

And in the time of greatest despair there shall come a saviour, and he shall be known as the Son of the Suns.

...Unless Darth Sidious schemes to use my son in my stead. It is, I think you will agree, the only logical conclusion. There is another Skywalker, and that means I am no longer unique.

I feel my master’s shadow breathing over this world. It runs far and it touches many things, but there is no thread that runs to Luke. I alone can sense him, and as I am blocked from my master’s intimacy by his cloud of obfuscation my son is not included in the fatescapes my master cultivates...

There is a schism in the Force and it rolls this way like thunder.

I have a bad feeling about this.

Darth Sidious: People Person

Something queer is afoot. I am uneasy.

Light lunch. Meeting a fan. Brisk, cool audience with the Emperor of the Galaxy.

The day began with a tedious set of inter-departmental meetings debriefing the operational tests we have conducted on this battle-station's systems over the past few days. Moff Jerjerrod was extremely pleased with himself, and took up an entire hour with a self-indulgent, morale-boosting lake of verbal diarrhea about surpassing our own benchmarks by honing our core competencies, or some such similar malarkey. "The operational efficiencies of this Death Star will serve as a template for all Death Stars to come!" he preened to scattered applause.

I had *such* a headache.

For lunch: leek soup and toss salad. I took my meal alone in my chambers, my gaze cast out over Endor's forest moon below as I enjoyed Pla'ateth's Concerto for Laserphone in D minor, a new recording from Muunilinst Grammophon with thirty-two distinct spatio-aural channels (and four additional channels left over for direct psychoneurotropic input, if that is your cup of tea -- myself, I am too old fashioned). Impressive. Most impressive.

I was interrupted by a high priority signal from across the galaxy, which is so classic: always when I'm eating. I donned my masque and rotated my hyperbaric chamber to face the holoprojector, which crackled to life at my command and displayed the face of Thet Moor of the Imperial Secret Service.

"My Lord," he began without preamble, "indications are that the Rebel squadrons we've been chasing are converging together at a point off the ecliptic, in a lake of void beyond the Sullust Star."

"Have you reported to the Emperor?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"Your service will be remembered, and rewarded," I intoned. Thet Moor bowed his head and broke transmission.

I was meditating on this new information when a call sounded at the door. It was Moff Jerjerrod stopping by to tell me the Emperor commanded my presence. I made a mental note to crush his trachea with my mind at the first politically reasonable opportunity, and made my way to my master's tower with the snaggle-toothed idiot loping at my heels.

We rode the elevator with a junior lieutenant whose skin prickled at the sound of my respirator. He seemed on the verge of passing out for most of the ride, his adam's apple working in his throat. Just as the door slipped back with a hiss and I moved to leave he managed to call, "Lord Vader," in a pitiable squeak.

I paused, and turned back to him.

He took a deep breath. "I just wanted to say, sir, my Lord -- well, that I've always looked up to you. I don't know if people ever take the time to say...thanks. Thank you, Lord Vader. You're an inspiration to us all."

I hesitated, uncertain what to say, and in that moment of silence the young lieutenant began to stammer an apology. I stopped him by holding up one gloved, open hand. "Thank *you*, Lieutenant," I said evenly. "I hope to see you one day commanding the fleet."

"Yes, my Lord!" he grinned, saluting smartly. The elevator sighed closed and he disappeared. How charming!

"Shameless sycophancy," grunted Jerjerrod with that little smirk of his pulled tight over his mouth. "Let's not dawdle now, Lord Vader."

Using every ounce of self-control I barely avoided simultaneously breaking every bone

in the Moff's body with a spasm of pointed thought. He continued to make light banter as we walked, endangering his life. We paused at the threshold of Palpatine's tower. "Recognize this, Jerjerrod," I said, pointing my index finger menacingly in his face. "Had the Emperor not specifically requested that your life be spared for the time being, you would even now be holding your own quivering giblets in your hands."

Jerjerrod wet himself mutely.

I nodded with satisfaction and proceeded to the audience with my master. His Excellency's ministers stepped aside as I ascended the steps to his throne overlooking space. That is one thing my master and I have always shared: a common penchant for a scenic view.

Our discussion was brief and bewildering.

My master Darth Sidious was not interested in the terrorist fleet amassing at Sullust. He simply commanded me to leave the Death Star and await further instructions at my post aboard the Super-StarDestroyer *Executor*. His tone was discernably terse and dismissive. I could feel Jerjerrod smirking at my shoulder the whole time. Dismayed as I was, it is not my place to question my master...

And so here I am, back home so to speak. I already miss my view of the Sanctuary Moon for my *Executor* chambers are without ports, nestled deep within the heart of the ship out of harm's way. I am restless and irritable. I have nothing to do.

Admiral Piett dropped by to welcome me back, and had his yeoman sing me an entertaining ballad they had heard at last night's Ewok barbecue after I left. I admit most of it was lost on me as my thoughts wandered to Sullust, but I did pick up a bit at the end:

*Time and again our history plies the same synclastic waters;
The affairs of old live on again to haunt our sons and daughters.
And the wheel of the worlds turns round and round,
The wheel of the worlds turns round.*

By the blood of the martyr Darth Revan, I swear fate stalks this moon. Even the low men can feel the weight of destiny in the air. And yet I am commanded to go to my room and sit. This is a waste of a dark overlord.

Darth Vader's Day Off

Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.

Do you know what I think about being ordered to sit on my hands and wait aboard *Executor*? Blast it. You heard me: blast it right where the Sith don't shine.

I woke up this morning in a foul humour coupled with the determination not to spend another day staring at the walls in my hyperbaric chamber. In fact, I smashed my hyperbaric chamber -- which may have been overzealous, but it felt *really* good.

Klaxons rang out and a platoon of stormtroopers rushed through the doors. I pushed past them and into the corridor, breezing past a flotilla of stunned-looking repair droids and into the lift. While it ran through the levels I cracked my knuckles and grumbled to myself. Blasted Palpatine! Blasted galaxy!

When the ride stopped I noticed a minor clerk cowering in the corner of the elevator, sweat running down his cheeks as he whispered over and over again in a paralyzed mantra,

“Please don’t kill me, please don’t kill me, please don’t kill me...”

“As you were,” I rumbled, and swept out into the landing hangar.

I crossed the floor briskly, ignoring the queries and then shouts of the deck officer, heading directly for the bank of sleek TIE fighters parked against the starboard berth. A group of pilots dropped their conversation to watch me approach, suddenly nervous.

“Good morning, Lord Vader,” called the senior pilot. “What can we do for you today?”

“I will take that fighter,” I declared, never slackening in my pace as I bore down on their small group.

“My Lord, you’re not actually authorized to --”

I proceeded to the mounting ladder, his limp corpse dropping to the deck behind me. The other pilots took a respectful step back.

Once secured in the cockpit I used the laser cannons to smear the deck officer across the hangar in a long, black streak. His subordinates jumped to action in the control booth and I saw the green signal for launch clearance flash on my TIE fighter’s display. A timid voice crackled through the communicator: *“Enjoy your flight, Lord Vader. She has a full tank.”*

“Very good,” I replied and then without further preamble blazed the thrusters and sent the nimble fighter to the glowing mouth of the atmospheric shields and out into space, pilots and crew jumping aside to avoid the skim of my wings.

Space!

Infinite, unthinking, beautiful -- there is no peace like it in this world, whether by trance or narcotic. Married with the joy of flight the unblinking starscape becomes my paradise. Weightless, my ruined body feels young strength. Boundless, my spirit soars.

I veered tight across the bridge of *Executor*, no doubt causing Admiral Piett to spill his tea. I carried her over the deflector shield arrays and then plunged down Endor’s massive gravity-well, thrusting hard at the last second and shooting out along the planet’s limb followed by a trail of burning sky.

The silver clouds of the gas giant careened away to port as I throttled back and steered her toward a volcanic moon. I skirted the surface, dodging between pillars of sulphurous spume, hurtling between the rocklet baby moons the ashen orb carried as it crawled around Endor.

A little blue light indicating that I was exceeding the fighter’s design parameters kept flashing, so I popped it with a thought. Bloody engineers!

In the tranquility born of extreme evasive manoeuvring I found my thoughts drawn to Sullust. The Force may work in mysterious ways but its sense of symmetry is uncanny: the Rebel fleet is massing on exactly the other side of the galaxy from Endor, cast off in the darkness of the opposite rim.

Twin foundations separated by a galaxy, one sworn to uphold order and other sworn to disturb it.

The Sanctuary Moon loomed in my scopes, the Death Star hanging like a jewel above it. As I drew nearer I felt each tendril of Force my ship crossed, thousands of threads of connection from all across the cosmos converging in the heart of my master, the Dark Lord Sidious and Emperor Palpatine. And yet...

And yet there is a cable of causality that snakes from hyperspace to this world, trillions of life destinies somehow knitted into its fabric. It blazes against the blackness of my closed eyes, its wandering fringes caressing both the forest moon and the battle-station, nodes of fate quivering at the edge of actualization behind the velvet....

And yet it connects to my master not at all.

There can be but one explanation: the galaxy prepares for my ascension. The fulfillment of the prophecy is nigh.
I have never felt so alive.

This Is Tense

It begins.

How do you track one man named Luke Skywalker amid a teeming galaxy of quadrillions? Today, the question answers itself.

When I awoke this morning in my newly repaired hyperbaric chamber (wrent asunder as it was during yesterday's tantrum) I sensed a disturbance in the Force, followed immediately by a pain in all the diodes down my left side. I winced. Sensing activity, the chamber's automated intelligences swung into action, uncoupling my life support systems from the charger and reconnecting my respirator and masque.

As I rose I stumbled, so useless was my leg. My new leg! I cursed the roboticists and their crude work as I summoned the stream of Force I would require to soothe the malfunction.

Uneasy, I rode to the bridge and took my post before the wide viewports, gazing out at the apparently unfinished Death Star orbiting the verdant marble of Endor's forest moon. That is when I spotted the Tyderian shuttle stretch out of hyperspace and proceed toward us, a speck against the velvet.

The Force sang.

I strode over to Admiral Piett as he bent over the deflector control officer and inquired about the shuttle. They had transmitted an old code, but a valid one. The shuttle's arrival was no doubt according to the designs of my master, Darth Sidious the Emperor Palpatine.

"Seems normal enough to me," contributed the deflector control officer. "It's not like they're trying to keep their distance or anything."

"Shall I hold them?" prompted Piett, sensing my interest.

I closed my eyes and probed deeply, feeling my way along the dense network of the Force to the cluster of nodes that entwined the shuttle and its occupants. I knew at once that Han Solo was alive, and that Boba Fett must be dead; I saw a faceless droid, a primitive, and a woman bathed in the glare of destiny, lost in the halo surrounding my son, Luke Skywalker, his spirit blazing so that I cringed.

My left leg failed, and I found myself jiggling across the bridge unceremoniously. My focus returned and I steadied my errant limb, straightening slowly and stepping back toward the console. "Do not concern yourself, Admiral," I said in answer to Piett's quiet look.

I ordered the shuttle be let through. The defensive screen was collapsed and the Tyderian craft dropped away toward the forest moon.

My son is here! I *knew* something was happening. The cloaking veil has grown, and I know not who generates it -- never the less, nothing could hide his presence from me. Does my master see what I see? Dare I tell him?

This is tense.

I rushed aboard my shuttle and had it flown directly to the Death Star. Even as we landed in the hangar I had not decided my strategy. I moved briskly toward the Emperor's tower, striding through the corridor toward his private lift, the entrance to which was flanked by two Imperial Guards in crimson robes.

Before I reached them Moff Jerjerrod stepped out of the shadows between two bulkheads. “Lord Vader, what an unexpected surprise,” he grinned condescendingly, blocking my path. “I’m afraid His Excellency does not wish to be disturbed at the moment.”

I cannot fathom what hallucination fuels his arrogance! In answer I raised my gloved hand and willed his airways closed. Jerjerrod grabbed frantically at his collar, dropping to his knees and gasping. I said, “I will see the Emperor. Now.”

Jerjerrod nodded weakly, but the Imperial Guards took a sudden step forward, their force-pikes levelled and crackling. Their will reflects the desires of Darth Sidious directly, and so I knew I dared not stand against them. I nodded my assent silently and released my hold on Jerjerrod, who collapsed to the deck in a fit of agonized wheezing and voided his bladder.

“I will await the Emperor’s convenience,” I declared, and then turned heel and swept out to the anteroom.

An hour later Moff Jerjerrod emerged escorting my master’s Imperial ministers and two tall Kaminoans, their white heads bobbing gracefully as they walked. They proceeded to the main lift. Two Imperial Guards emerged next and stood before me. “The Dark Lord grants you audience tomorrow morning, Darth Vader.”

Tomorrow morning? I could not believe it. But all I said was, “As the Emperor commands.”

I am feeling more and more dispensible every day. I have taken up my quarters aboard the Death Star again while I wait for morning, gazing out at the clouds of the Sanctuary Moon. I spent some time trying to reconfigure my leg circuitry, but I cannot even seem to find the problem. I listened to some music, and did not eat much supper.

If indeed my master does plan to betray the Sith and pervert the succession, is there a way I can act to preserve the prophecy? This is the question that contorts my mind tonight.

Am I now truly irrelevant to the galaxy’s fate?

Here Comes The Son

The air is rich with portend. Destinies flicker in snaking forks from the fabric of space. Luke Skywalker is here now, on Endor’s forest moon below.

Mood: everything!

I waited an hour in the anteroom to the tower of my master Darth Sidious the Emperor Palpatine before the crimson-clad Imperial Guards motioned to me that I was now cleared to proceed. It’s always pomp and circumstance with those guys. I stepped inside the lift, and when the door slid back again I saw my master’s throne turned away toward the stars.

I climbed the steps and stood before him. After a pause he turned his throne only partly and muttered with irritation, “I *told* you to remain on the command ship.”

I explained about the rebels aboard the Tyderian shuttle. Sidious turned to face me, the corners of his mouth drawn down in a sneer of contempt. “Yes, I know,” he said sharply, yellow eyes piercing me from the shadows of his mantle.

“My son is with them,” I added.

I felt his surprise ripple through the Force. “Are you sure?” he asked, his eyes narrowing.

“I have felt him, my master.”

“Strange that I have not,” he said airily, his fingers playing thoughtfully against one

another. I felt his mind touch mine, probing around its edges, quietly deflected by the cloud of obfuscation I felt myself generating without conscious effort. Sidious leaned forward. "I wonder if your feelings on this matter are clear, Lord Vader."

"They are clear, my master," I said with terror in my heart.

It was an agonizing moment before he replied, and I felt certain he had penetrated my intimate mind and seen the confusion there. Instead he sat back in his throne and said, "Then you must go to the Sanctuary Moon, and wait for him."

"*He* will come to *me*?"

"I have foreseen it," enunciated Sidious crisply. I sensed that his thoughts lacked the conviction of his demeanor -- he was troubled by the shadows in his vision. I felt his mind lick at my spirit again, feeling over the exterior veneer. "His compassion for you will be his undoing," said Sidious. I hesitated, so he continued with strained patience: "*He* will come to *you*, and then you will bring him before *me*."

He turned his throne back toward the stars.

"As you wish," I said, and took my leave silently.

In the corridor I nearly ran into Moff Jerjerrod, who flinched back from me with wide eyes. "Lord Vader," he whispered, his throat raw from yesterday's little incident between us, "General Veers has signalled from the surface. He says a rebel terrorist has surrendered to his forces."

So, my master's vision is not entirely enshrouded! The surrendering rebel could only be my son, Skywalker, as Sidious had foreseen. I took a moment to absorb the information, breathing slowly as I stood over Jerjerrod.

I heard a trickling splash, and looked down to see a small puddle gathering around the good Moff's boots.

Like I said before, joy in life is found in the little things. To Jerjerrod I said, "Prepare my shuttle. I will see to this personally."

"Yes, my Lord," he squeaked and then scurried away. Which was fortunate timing, because I would have been embarrassed to have him witness the way I fell against the corridor bulkhead, my left leg jerking spasmodically under me.

I recovered myself with an effort, and again summoned the tendrils of Force I would need to wrap through my leg's control circuitry and restore me to a dignified level of function. I did not sleep last night and the exhaustion has magnified my limb's recalcitrance. I felt overwhelmed with melancholy, and suddenly so very weak.

As I made my way through the Death Star I found myself looking upon it with a strange nostalgia. There is always something going on aboard the Death Star -- from the galleria mall to the competitive gymnasium -- and though I have always felt apart from the life of the men I have never felt so disconnected as I do today.

I stopped in for a quick pick-me-up at the Imperial House Tavern, and by coincidence ended up standing at the bar next to Admiral Piett his newest *protege*, a third-class midshipman with blonde hair and a vapid expression. "What a pleasure!" Piett greeted me warmly. "Can I buy you a drink, m'Lord?"

"Corellian wine," I said. "I will take it in my private booth." I began to walk away and then paused. "Why don't you join me, Admiral?"

Piett looked stricken for a fleeting second. "Sir," he replied with a nod.

He came around with the drinks in just a few minutes, his new boy following timidly on his heels. They ranged themselves around the octagonal table as the door hissed shut. Piett placed a goblet before me. "Thank you," I said. After a brief pause I announced awkwardly, "I will take off my masque now."

“Of course, m’Lord,” said Piett. I saw him swallow hard. His boy kept his eyes on his drink, stirring it nervously with his pinky.

I disengaged my hood and then removed the upper section of my face-plate, my burned and scarred features visible above the breathing apparatus at my chin. Piett maintained a rigid composure betraying no shock, but the midshipman could not help but gape. With a snortling suction sound the private booth’s life support umbilicus attached itself to a port on my neck. “I propose a toast,” I said.

Piett and the midshipman raised their glasses expectantly.

“To destiny,” I said simply.

“To destiny!” they echoed, and we all drank. There was an awkward moment after that. Piett coughed and then asked, “Pardon my candor m’Lord, but is there something troubling you?”

I sipped my drink again. “Do you have any children, Piett?”

“Children?” he replied, looking faintly amused. “No, m’Lord, no children.”

“I have a brother,” offered the midshipman helpfully.

“I have a son,” I said. Piett’s eyes widened but his expression remained smooth.

The midshipman grinned. “Congratulations!”

Piett watched me with concern. “M’Lord?” he prompted gently.

“My son is a member of the Rebel Alliance,” I confessed, eyes cast down at my drink. “He has surrendered to Veers, and I go now to take him into custody.”

I heard Piett sigh. “Blast,” he said under his breath. He finished the rest of his drink in a swallow. “Is there -- is there something I can do, m’Lord? You know you can ask anything of me, sir.”

I nodded slowly and gave his shoulder a squeeze. “You are a good man, Piett. But I must face him...alone.”

After a few more moments of silence I finished my drink and replaced my masque. Outside the booth came the sounds of laughter and merry chatter, and it made me feel hollow inside. I flexed my fingers and stood up. “You understand, of course, this conversation never took place.”

“Of course, m’Lord,” replied Piett.

“Unfortunate about the boy,” I added, glancing over at the blonde midshipman.

Piett blinked, and then regained his composure. “There are plenty more where he came from, m’Lord.”

“What do you mean?” asked the midshipman right before his head dropped heavily to the table, his last breath pressing windily out of his lungs. I tossed a few Imperial coins down and left. “Sorry about the mess,” I muttered to the proprietor.

Now I am aboard my shuttle, taking these idle moments to chronicle the day’s events before I go to meet Skywalker on the surface. I do not know when I will next have a chance to write. Even now my shuttle has crossed the terminator into the forest’s moons shadow, descending through the wet, night air toward the landing platform where Veers’ walker will meet us.

The time of confrontation is at last here!

Daddy’s home.

Darth Vader Superstar

My name is Anakin Skywalker.

I was born forty-nine years ago, less a day. I was born a slave, as billions are born slaves. When I was a child I did not immediately imagine that I deserved freedom, for this was not my mother's attitude. Suffering was to be endured. She admitted a patient hope for less cruel masters, when we were between them. She taught that if freedom was in our destinies, fate would find us.

We were not starved, and were seldom beaten. I didn't think it was so bad. My mother Shmi and I looked out for one another. When the loathsome Gardulla the Hutt lost us to Watto the junk-dealer I got my first chance to take machines apart and put them back together, and it was amazing. The more I fixed things the more things Watto gave me to fix. My mother was also profitable. It was a happy relationship that more than halfway resembled a family, much like the one Watto had lost years before on Toydaria.

Everything changed after the Mandalorian came. With a cold manner he made his cruel desires plain. My mother refused him. Watto backed her up and the Mandalorian attacked him, casting him about the shop like a sack of meal. He could not protect her. I ran out and stuck a knife in the Mandalorian's thigh. He struck back at me savagely. I lay dazed in the corner as he laughed and turned on my mother.

I could not protect her.

I was six.

That is when the dreams began, in which I could fix the mechanisms of life as easily as I could machines. At night I saw an elaborate tapestry of iridescent threads that connected all things to all others, backwards and forwards through time forever. To play a song upon its fibres required only the gentlest flexing of my mind, the resonating harmonies describing new patterns in the network of connection that in turn rippled through to the arrangement of real things. The dreams were incredible. Like flying. Like being free.

One night near Boonta Eve I was working to exhaustion to repair Watto's sponsored racer in time for the next day's qualifier. I was so tired I began to dream with my eyes open. I could see the strands that bound all things with my waking vision, swimming and forking in reaction to my thoughts and movements. Suddenly the solution to a vexing problem with the starboard thruster was as clear as day -- it was obvious, when one could read between the lines.

And then I dreamed that I wielded a sword of fire, and that I slay any enemy that stood in my path. I dreamed I was a warrior, and that I could protect *everybody*. It was better than flying. I was a hero.

I mentioned the dreams idly to my mother one day. To my surprise she took the matter very seriously. "Anakin," she said, touching my shoulders and looking into my eyes, "has anyone ever told you about the Jedi?"

I shook my head. "What's a Jedi?"

"They are warrior-monks from the Republic. Their weapons are laser-swords."

"Just like in my dream!"

"Just like in your dream," she echoed. "You are a very special boy, Anakin, and I believe that the Force speaks through you."

"What's the Force?"

She smiled and closed her eyes for a moment, asking me to do the same. I closed my eyes. She said, "Anakin, in the quietest night, without sand-cricket or womp-rats, when the

temperature is so perfect you can't even feel your blanket, and everything is still, and your mind is quiet...even if you seal out every part of the world you feel -- there is still something there."

"Yes," I whispered.

"That is the Force, Anakin," she said, putting her hand on my heart. "And it will never leave you. It is always there for us. It is a part of being alive."

That was a long, long time ago.

It is she, Shmi Skywalker, who haunts my thoughts tonight as I stare out over the night forest of Endor's moon. I miss her. But in some ways she is alive again, for I saw her spectre in my son's eyes, and heard it in his voice. It was a like physical blow.

Galaxy save me.

My son said, "I know there is good in you. The Emperor hasn't driven it from you fully. That was why you couldn't destroy me, that's why you won't bring me to your Emperor now."

He looked out into the forest spread out beneath the landing platform, his back to me. I ignited his light-sabre, its green glow filling the corridor. Smooth action, nice gyroscopic response. I always end up fiddling around with gadgets whenever somebody says something that makes me feel uncomfortable. "I see you have constructed a new light-sabre," I said, retracting the blade and turning the handle over in my hands. "Your skills are complete. Indeed you are powerful as the Emperor has foreseen."

I turned away then, my feelings threatening my composure and the stability of my left leg. I felt Luke's mind open to my own, reading my heart in a rush of communication I was too slow to interrupt. His thoughts were flavoured like mine, and my defenses could not discern them. His mind is mine.

"Come *with* me," he implored suddenly.

Through the fabric of the Force I could feel him reaching out to me, his hand open. It just about broke my heart. Only Shmi Skywalker knew love that pure, and I felt her spirit stir within him to my horror and shame. I took hold of the railing, fearing I would fall.

And then I felt the slithering tentacles of Darth Sidious' mind descend upon my consciousness, encircling my wounded heart and cooling it. A voice in my thoughts asked me what destiny of chaos I would have the galaxy face if not for the strength of the enduring New Order. My spirit suffused with a dark light, and my leg began to feel normal again.

I turned around to face my son. "You don't understand the power of the dark side. I *must* obey my master."

Luke made his appeal again, stepping up to me and searching my lenses with his eyes. "I feel the conflict with you, let go of your hate!"

Poor fool, if only he knew. Innocent as a junior temple youngling, he parroted the dead preachings of an extinct order of loveless charlatans. If only the difference between dark and light were so simple as not being afraid. He cannot conceive of the fear he must know if he is to face the burden of the true Force.

It is too late for me. My hour has come and gone. Words would gain us nothing. And I could stand the torment of his gaze no longer. I ordered Skywalker be flown up to the Death Star without further delay. "...My father is truly dead," said my son as the lift closed.

My leg drooped and I stepped over to the railing again, facing my own dim reflection in the windows. My throat filled with bile as I considered that I had just lost the faith of the one person in this universe who would forgive me, and whose love could redeem me. I have just closed the door on my salvation...

My name is Anakin Skywalker, and I am responsible for the death of my mother,

because I broke our bond to pursue my ambition. I am responsible for the death of my wife, the mother of my child, the only woman strong enough and smart enough to win my faith. I am responsible for the death of Jedi Master Obi-wan Kenobi, who once tried to show me the real meaning of friendship and loyalty. And then there was Qui-gon Jinn who could have been like the father I never had, but Palpatine stole him from me.

Palpatine!

I think I have always hated him, channeling my jealousy at his power and dignity into a sick kind of devotion. I wanted him to love me, but he is not really a man with a heart -- whatever daemon rules him has its tonsils deep in the darkest layers of this galaxy.

I know now that my master, Darth Sidious the Emperor Palpatine, means to betray the Sith and subvert the prophecy. He means to replace me with my son as his prodigal servant. So armed he means to rule the stars himself, forever.

This job has a glass ceiling.

I should never have been born. Without me, Palpatine would be lost. I was essential. But now I am nothing. My very life inside this mechanized mockery of a body relies on the raw power of the dark side that is focused through him. I could not be without his blessing. And his blessing fails, so I go to join Tyrannus.

I was not strong enough. I have failed everyone.

...And yet, there is my son with Shmi in his eyes -- a product of love, before the storm. He is no Jedi, for his passion blows too hot, but perhaps he is not Sith, either. He is an instrument of change. He is the catalyst at the centre, the fulcrum on which pivot fates. To see him is to be blinded by the glory of the Force that orbits him like living netting.

My meditation was interrupted by the scintillating spirit of Qui-gon Jinn appearing at my elbow. "Anakin," he called, his voice sounding far away. "Take heart: the prophecy is fulfilled on the morrow."

"But how?" I asked, shaking my head. "How can that be? What can I do?"

Qui-gon's eyes sparkled. "You will make the right decision, when the choice lies before you."

"Sidious must die, but I cannot slay him. And Luke cannot hope to have enough power to do so himself."

"There are different kinds of power," Qui-gon pointed out. "You are the Son of Suns. Nothing can change that, Ani. Just because you cannot see the path does not mean it is not beneath your feet."

And with that he faded away, leaving me alone.

The world crept back in. First crickets, then the buzzing lights of the corridor, the call of a raptor, the rustling leaves. The living Force undulated around me, my breath carried away to mix with the wind. I drank deep. One must never forget to taste the present, the fleeting, sweetest moment you can ever know no matter how many adventures you pursue. There is nothing like the now, to cleanse you.

Qui-gon was right. My mother was, too. The Force has shaped this life of mine, from birth to this holy now. Every turn in the path has been an instruction in a series of lessons designed to make me the monster I am, to breed my unwilling heart for whatever lies ahead tomorrow.

Qui-gon said I would have a choice. I cannot fathom it but I have faith.

If he's right, I need not *die* a slave.

The sun is rising. Morning birds are singing. The mist is burning off the trees. I have already delayed too long. I must join my son on the Death Star, and bring him before my master. Come what may.

And so, dear reader, I must bid you adieu. You have been along with me for much, but you cannot join me on this final journey.

I go now to meet my destiny.

Appendix A: Anne Arkham's Darth Vader Interview

April 2005

<http://www.annearkham.com>

I've been flirting with the Dark Lord of the Sith for the past week or so, and he kindly agreed to be interviewed on my site. Be sure to check out his, too.

AA: Age?

DV: Forty-eight Coruscant Standard Years. Forty-nine come winter.

AA: Astrological sign?

DV: Twins of Illium, I believe. Astrological signs do not feature prominently in the Sith philosophy. I might be under the Lucas Star. Maybe I'm cusp. When does winter come on your planet?

AA: Are you currently residing on a Death Star or on a planet?

DV: I live and work aboard the Super-StarDestroyer 'Executor'. I have a suite, but I spend most of my time in my robot-encrusted hyperbaric chamber. That's my "me" space.

AA: Any plans to do an episode of "Clibs"?

DV: I'm sorry, but I have no idea what that is.

AA: Boxers or briefs?

DV: I do not wear underwear. I enjoy the feel of the leather.

AA: (swoons)

AA: Favorite book?

DV: To be candid, I am less a book-reading person so much as a book-burning person. In this respect, I prefer light, hardbound editions made from natural fibers rather than plastics or hologenerated material. The smoke is much cleaner.

AA: Turn ons?

DV: I have always gone for the princess on the outside, warrior on the inside. It harkens back to feelings for my mother, who had the strength to maintain grace and dignity, even in the face of great suffering. I think it is the sense of dichotomy that attracts me; that a woman can have faces both apparent and secret; that she, like me, is not entirely fathomable from the surface.

AA: Turn offs?

DV: Hesitation. Self-effacement. Doubt. Mercy.

AA: Describe your most embarrassing moment.

DV: It may sound trite to you, but the single most embarrassing moment of my life was when I bickered with the Senator of Naboo over how best to protect her, and she called me on it right in front of the Queen. I just wanted to die. And then there was that time when Yoda pulled down my pants at the Jedi Jamboree.

AA: What are your hobbies? Antiquing? Yoga?

DV: I meditate. I listen to music. I cull the chaff from the wheat among the Imperial citizenry, and kill them.

AA: What do you like best about being a despot?

DV: Power is its own reward. Why search for more? Be happy; that's how I look at it. I

rule the galaxy with my master, who is genuinely easy to work with day in and day out.

AA: What do you like the least?

DV: The hours. I have not had a vacation since, oh, before you were born.

AA: If you couldn't be an intergalactic bully, what would you be?

DV: Podracer. Or possibly a composer. I do not play any instruments, but if I could devote some serious time to it.....who knows? It would also be cool to design robots professionally. I see some really sub-par robots out there.

AA: Your wang has attracted a good deal of attention lately. You have led us to believe it was burned to a crisp long ago, yet you recently rented "Shave My Wookie Thang" on Death Star Pay-Per-View. What's the real story?

DV: The truth of the matter is that nine tenths of my pelvis is cybernetic, with very little organic material connecting to my thigh-stumps. I don't mean to be grisly, but there it is. I do have access to certain....attachments, however.

AA: (swoons again)

AA: Do you find it unsettling that so many women dream of moaning the words "Darth Vader, only you could be so bold"?

DV: It can be lonely at the top. And that's all I have to say about that.

AA: What are your future plans for the Empire?

DV: Once this destructive conflict with the rebels has been smoothes over, I think we're in for a period of extended stability and prosperous growth. I understand the various governors met recently at Coruscant to discuss, as the media put it, "jobs, jobs, and jobs". I know that this is a concern for many citizens, and their concerns lie close to the heart of His Excellency the Emperor.

AA: So much press has been focused on the negative aspects of your dictatorship: the foreign policy gaffes, the heavy taxes, the human rights violations. Would you like to take a moment to clear up any misconceptions?

DV: Every transition has its rough patches. Change is hard. What we're trying to do is clear out the pipes of a thousand years of decadence and spoil. It is not an easy job, and a lot of hard decisions have to be made. But let us look at the facts: taxes are down, trade routes open and regulated, and the local warlords are being subdued. That's progress. Sensible citizens understand that enduring a suspension of civil liberties is a sacrifice worth making in the name of securing an enduring peace.

AA: What are your feelings on stem cell research?

DV: I do not study primitive medicine.

AA: What are your feelings on gay marriage?

DV: I have been to worlds were they have six sexes. The New Order has no interest in what goes on in the bedrooms of its citizens, and as long as their marriage licenses are paid for with good Imperial Credits, I cannot see anyone complaining.

AA: What is the Empire doing to improve access to affordable health care?

DV: We have smashed asunder the old medical guilds, and replaced them with a system of advanced, efficient and gentle 'droids. Problem solved. Unemployment among physicians is a bit of an issue, but I am confident my master will find something useful for them to do. Perhaps museum work.

AA: Or you could kill them.

DV: That, too.

AA: Why a light saber? Why not a blaster?

DV: A light saber is self-recharging, defensive as well as offensive, and a tool as well as a weapon. Also, it makes a really cool noise when you swish it around.

THE DARTH SIDE: MEMOIRS OF A MONSTER • Cheeseburger Brown

AA: There have been rumors that you have a talk show/reality show in the works. Care to comment?

DV: Scurrilous lies.

AA: Any words of advice for someone starting out in the field of being an evil dictator?

DV: Yes. Please come down to my office and we shall have a little chat. Come alone.

Appendix B: Maurice Mitchell's Cheeseburger Brown Interview

May 2005

<http://www.mauricem.blogspot.com>

On May 11th 2005, I happened to notice the little section at the bottom of the Blogger.com homepage called "Blogs of Note". Always on the lookout for new and interesting blogs, I visited one that had an attention grabbing title: "The Darth Side". I figured it would be good for a laugh. What I found was one of the most original blogs I had ever seen and I posted an entry for my BlogWatch section.

After enjoying it on so many levels, I contacted the author Cheeseburger Brown, who graciously took time out of his busy schedule to grant an email interview. For the full insightful, and very funny interview, click on the link:

Thanks Cheeseburger Brown, I appreciate your time.

How long have you been blogging?

As with any suitably contagious neologism, the meaning of the term "blogging" has forked more than once over the past few years. For instance, somebody recently told me that an on-line journal without any external hyperlinks is, in fact, not a blog at all but merely a homepage-based diary arranged in reverse-chronological order. How's that for splitting hairs?

I started posting articles, diaries and comments to the famous/infamous community-edited multiblog/metablog Kuro5hin (<http://www.kuro5hin.org>) in the spring of 2002. It's pronounced "corrosion" for the uninitiated, as a play on the name of its founder, American software engineer, collaborative media guru and odd-job general-purpose contractor Rusty Foster. Like most people, I found Kuro5hin via Slashdot.

It was through Kuro5hin that I learned the term "blog" and decided to investigate the phenomenon, so I registered an experimental weblog through Xanga. It took me about a month to fully appreciate the deficiencies of the system, at which time I signed-up with Blog*Spot and created "I Am A Cheeseburger" (<http://cheeseburgerbrown.blogspot.com>), a personal weblog I continue to maintain.

I know the cool kids had blogs long before that, but I've never been swift on the uptake as far as bleeding-edge communications revolutions go. I am ultimately a technological conservative, and tend not to venture too far with new tools until they've been proven useful, painless and out of beta.

When you started blogging, did you know that it would become such a cultural phenomenon?

As a late adopter I would have had to have been blind not to notice that blogging was attracting legions of users who might otherwise have made fairly unlikely content-creators --

the simplicity of the process and the accessibility of the journal concept meant that people who found computers confusing or scary could play, too. I knew that signalled some kind of a sea-change.

It made sense to me, at first, that blogging might help filter search results by augmenting automated spidering with human eyes and opinions. And I think that worked for a while before the Blogosphere became too cohesive, and the trends started reinforcing one another in amplifying loops that meant nine-tenths of the blogs out there were simply blogging other bloggers.

Ultimately blogging has made the web more human, which among other things means more noise. Academic bloggers (and especially vigilant journalist bloggers) help somewhat by sorting the wheat from the chaff, but, let's face it: there's an ocean of chaff out there. With every voice added there is increased potential to find a diamond of insight, but in general the observations of the average human being posted on the Internet are as startlingly insipid, inarticulate and banal as in any other medium. We all tell stories, but most of us do a mediocre job at it. That's why we pay people to write books for us.

I support a noisier web. I'm confident the brainiacs at the big search engine concerns will figure out a way to make it work. I believe that the Internet as a whole is only strengthened by a greater number of users, especially when they come from walks of life other than computer science. The blogging phenomenon is the closet realization we have seen of McLuhan's "global village" -- hackneyed as that particular meme may be after being so carelessly tossed around in the late nineties like a cultural-wankology good-time-girl by primitive techno-journalists whose principal exposure to net culture was passing around fart jokes by e-mail.

Blogs are homepages made useful for the everyman. If it hadn't taken off the way it did, I'd be wondering whether the world really wanted an Internet at all.

So I guess my short answer would be: Yeah. But, c'mon. I mean, duh.

What made you decide to start Darthside?

Hold on, let me see. I'm sure it's in my history.

Here we go. I had been following tps12's (<http://www.bloglines.com/blog/tps12>) delightfully ironic "Great Moments in 'The Phantom Menace'" series on Hulver's Site (<http://www.hulver.com>), which on 8 April 2005 featured a still frame of Jake Lloyd as young Anakin Skywalker wearing piloting goggles. In a thread of commentary started by Bostian smart-guy DesiredUsername it occurred to me that there was tragicomic value in juxtaposing elements of Darth Vader as portrayed in the so-called classic saga with Anakin Skywalker as portrayed in the prequels.

So I registered the user "Darth Vader" at Hulver's Site, and posted a bogus diary entry from a typical day in the dark lord's life. The post garnered some interested commentary, so I few days later I posted another entry which garnered even more.

At the same time I had been considering different ways to harness enthusiasm for the coming release of "Revenge of the Sith" to drive some traffic through my website, seeing as I have a handful of crusty fan pages hanging around my web tree and some minor visibility in the search engines. I was trying to think of a Star Wars themed article to write, to freshen things up. I had hopes of using Star Wars writing as a portal to my non-Star Wars related wares.

The continuing positive feedback from the discerning geeks of Hulver's Site on the faux-Vader style suggested to me that a solution may have presented itself: the ongoing personal journal of the man behind the masque. So, after a frustrating quarter hour hunting and pecking for an available Vader-related sub-domain through Blogger, I set up The Darth Side weblog on 11 April 2005.

What attracted you to the idea of using Darth Vader as a blogger?

Like many adult-children of my generation I have a special place in my heart for the core characters of the first Star Wars movie from 1977.

When we were kids we used to "play Star Wars", which is a kind of no-fee intellectual property union we entered unto with Lucasfilm whereby our imaginations were ignited in exchange for our fealty as future consumers. I was always content to leave the Holy Trinity of Luke-Leia-Solo up to more obnoxious children (who would throw tantrums or cry if they didn't get to pretend to be who they wanted to), instead taking the roles of less popular characters like droids or villains. In this way I got used to seeing things from the point of view of C-3P0, or Darth Vader.

Also, Darth Vader makes available one of the classic devices for exploring character issues, the dual personality. Like Jekyll and Hyde, the behaviour of each gives insight into the other. Behind the masque is both a fearsome knight-tyrant and a simpering teenager -- Vader and Anakin. It is the conflict and confluence of these two distinct personalities that gives my version of Vader his particular voice.

Are you surprised by the success of "Darthside"?

Yes. I had initially intended to add new entries three or four times a week, playing to an audience of a few hundred readers daily. I had hoped to push a thousand visitors through the blog by the release of "Revenge of the Sith."

However, the blog was meta-blogged about by 606, a coder and DJ from Alberta, on MonkeyFilter (<http://www.monkeyfilter.org>), which brought it to the attention of the producers of the G4 Network's "Attack of the Show." The following night they aired excerpts from the blog, as well as brief skit based on the content (Vader sitting under a tree writing in a little notebook, that sort of thing). I wised up to this when I noticed my webstats going through the roof.

So I started posting daily, and word of Vader's blog began to circulate more widely across the web. It was Slashdotted at the end of April, and that pretty much sealed the deal: even after the initial surge of hundreds of thousands had died out, tens of thousands of visitors continued to come back to read more, day after day.

I am certainly surprised at how the traffic had sustained. I had figured that a lot of bloggers were linking up The Darth Side as a lark, a one-off grab for a topical hyperlink in Star Wars season -- burst traffic that would quickly peter out. But it hasn't petered out. Apparently a lot of people feel it's worthwhile reading past the initial joke of Vader blogging.

Your humor is dark, but satirical, what do you use as inspiration for the posts?

As has been remarked elsewhere in the Blogosphere, the entries are best enjoyed if read with James Earl Jones' inimitable delivery in mind. If you put just about anything mundane in that voice, it's already halfway funny.

I've drawn heavily on the spirit of Douglas Adams, which I think is appropriate given his stature as a founding father of space-farce, as well as aspects of Harry Harrison's tone in The Stainless Steel Rat series. Much of the specific romantic phraseology comes from George Lucas himself, of course.

There's some Joseph Heller in there too, and maybe a pinch of Kurt Vonnegut.

References from Isaac Asimov inevitably crop up since, from a certain point of view, the Star Wars Saga is really just "Foundation" For Kids, with the complex and subtle themes remixed in cartoon proportions. The First Foundation is the Jedi Order and the Second Foundation is the Sith -- the rest follows naturally.

The entries you write have a huge amount of background material from the movies. How often have you watched the Star Wars trilogies?

I'd rather not quantify that sort of thing for risk of flushing the reputation of my critical faculties entirely down the toilet. Suffice to say I am very familiar with all five of the movies released to date.

How do you feel about the current Star Wars trilogy compared to the original?

The greatest Star Wars thrill I have ever experienced was watching the teaser trailer for "The Phantom Menace" on my desktop computer in 1998, the hairs on the back of my neck standing up as it dawned on me that *this was real*. I was completely innocent. I had no idea how badly it would be possible to muck it up. All I could see was "more Star Wars!" and imagine, certainly naively, that I could enjoy it as much as I had as a kid.

It wasn't just me. I presented the trailer for all of my visitors over the following months, and it gave many of them gooseflesh, too. "Holy crap!" they would say. "Play it again. I feel like I'm six!"

Opening day was, I admit, disappointing, illustrating a prime example of an effect that continues to plague the franchise: the myth will always be grander than the matter.

In my opinion the only movie in the series that stands up on its own merits as a quality piece of cinema is "A New Hope." Coloured with a rich visual sensibility, a tongue-in-cheek devotion to the motifs of early twentieth century thriller serials, and a genuinely Campbellian line-up of archetypical mythological characters, it hangs together as a neat, closed-loop story

with all the clumsy excesses of Lucasian romance coming off as by design.

In terms of the larger series the spiritual climax of the saga occurs in "The Empire Strikes Back", thus dooming "Return of the Jedi" to be a bit of a limp conclusion. I thought "Attack of the Clones" was a reasonable apology for "The Phantom Menace."

Episode II also holds a special place in my esteem because of the stunning visual and sound design work off the opening crawl, in which the achingly cool Royal Naboo Cruiser descends into Coruscant, my favourite Star Wars location. I believe the score is also among John Williams' finest, though I am truly giddy with anticipation for his work on "Revenge of the Sith."

John Williams is the narcotic glue that holds Lucas' saga together.

What do you think of the Star Wars fans waiting in line at a theater that's not playing Star Wars (liningup.net)?

I admire the gumption to stick to their guns. I think there is a certain dignity in going down as the biggest living jokes in Star Wars history. Seriously.

When did you begin writing?

May 1987. Sunny day. Had an urgent need to encode my sensations into artifact form after a run-in with a familiar bully, which concluded with my pushing him out of a (slowly) moving bus. Dramatic stuff, for the sixth grade.

As a creative writer, where do you see the online literary field going, and why?

What do I know? As a creative writer I'm just one of the thousands who have discovered that getting instant feedback from hundreds of strangers each time you write makes you a helluva lot better a helluva lot faster than writing things only seen by yourself or your spouse. The web is the greatest free proving ground for writing talent the world has ever known. If you're any stripe of writer and you're not putting your stuff out there, you're wasting a golden opportunity.

I know a few writers have had made serious goes of hawking their self-published works on the net, like John Sundman (<http://www.wetmachine.com>) and Frank Duff (<http://www.256k.org/fd/>), who have inspired me to try to do the same with my collected writings later this year. I have a non-child oriented storybook available now, as an experiment (<http://www.lulu.com/content/120266>). We'll see how many people it reaches.

Blogging in the style of The Darth Side is more akin in some ways to the early days of radio or television broadcasting: the goal is to appeal to a wide enough audience to draw in enough sustained, targeted traffic to make the site attractive to advertisers, who want their message in front of those valuable eyeballs. It's a kind of perversely indirect micro-payment system for the content creator. (I'm not up on my buzzword ecology -- is the term "micro-payments" dead yet?)

Which I think is good. Anything that ties the author closer to the audience is good.

Separated from the hype of big publisher marketing, if your writing is popular on the net it can only be because the quality is there. Nobody is reading just because of your name. The reader has not spent a nickel up front to gain access to the content (unlike a magazine or a book), and thus will cast you away from their screen in a heartbeat if you lose their interest for even a second. They have nothing to lose. No aspect about the audience's attention can be assumed -- as a web writer you have to work hard for it, paragraph by paragraph.

So I guess the short answer is that I feel the world of on-line writing will, above all, make me a better writer when I eventually find success with a traditional meatspace publisher. I will have developed an instinct for capturing and carrying people's attention, honed by years of feedback from folks who have no interest in protecting my feelings.

Ultimately I feel that any good writer needs a professional editor. And right now the best way to find a talented one of those is to go through traditional channels.

I am confident this will not change in the future. Also, I foresee that fifty years from now computers be half the size, and twice as fast.

Based on your website, you seem to have a varied taste in creative expression, from writing, to art, to photography and film. Which is your favorite and why?

My favourite is storytelling. The medium is a secondary concern. I like to transport people elsewhere for an hour, and cause them to feel.

What was your childhood like, and how do you feel it contributed to your current outlook on life?

I'm a white middle-class Canadian male with sane parents of reasonable means -- my childhood was uninterrupted by any real strife. I was always encouraged. It was clearly communicated to me that art was a worthwhile discipline, deserving of time, focus and what materials my parents could provide. I attended hours upon hours of traditional painting classes as a boy, and then went on to serve as a teenage apprentice to an oil-painter.

I attended the famous Nova Scotia College of Art & Design for few years, but they lost me when one summer I discovered how much money companies were willing to throw at any graphic artist who claimed to have any remote idea what the Internet was. I bought my first modem right after accepting my first commission to illustrate a website, and then proceeded to try to figure out what a website was. That was in 1996. I've been a professional commercial artist ever since.

To tell the whole truth, however, I am a better writer than a designer. I'd happily cast off the workaday world of visual effects compositing for the glamour and excitement of sitting at my desk typing all day.

My parents fed me the standard lies: you can do anything you set your mind to, never let go of your dreams, diligence and patience will be rewarded -- and so on and so forth. Typical malarkey, only I was fool enough to believe it. Whether or not it pans out in the end is a matter for the writer of my obituary.

Which artists inspired you, or inspire you today?

This is going to sound bizarre, but I'm going to have to mention George Lucas. I mean, I could wax wanky on the troubled life of Beethoven or Dickens' amazing live storytelling zeal, but the reality is that the imagination that made the single biggest impact on me as a kid was George Lucas. He had a vision he believed in, and he just about killed himself to see it through. And he did it independently.

I'm sure Steven Spielberg was the next name to enter my child consciousness as a man held in awe. My father was always an enthusiastic deconstructor of Spielberg's cinematic techniques, and he delighted in pointing out to me how the director was manipulating our expectations scene by scene by employing a panoply of timeless storytelling tricks and drawing on a rich, shared history of cultural references. My favourite Spielberg picture is "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

I love Stanley Kubrick. I think if you ever want to make a movie, any movie, you should be forced to watch every one of his pictures a hundred times. Especially "Lolita" which is in my opinion his finest work.

Brad Bird is a shining talent, and not sufficiently appreciated for his subtle mastery of storytelling mechanics. He also has a reputation as a merciless, unreasonable, tyrannical director who demands perfection at any cost of sweat or dime, which is a character flaw I can appreciate.

Who else influences me? Terry Gilliam, Charlie Kauffman, Baz Luhrmann, John Irving, Cory Doctorow, John Varley, Cordwainer Smith, Clifford D. Simak -- there's a dozen I'm forgetting. What they all have in common is a foundation gift for telling a compelling tale in an engaging way.

Any final thoughts?

It's been a helluva ride. Thanks for reading, world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cheeseburger Brown is a compulsive storyteller. He is the author of illustrated storybooks and novels about robots and spaceships, as well as a free syndicated stream of scifi serials presented each week via the Internet.

Mr. Brown lives in a century-old schoolhouse in rural Canada with his wife, two children, and several large dogs. He enjoys a nice song, but dances poorly.

Mr. Brown's other works include *Simon of Space*, *The Bikes of New York* and *Hot Buttered Something*.

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