

STAR WARS
THE RISE AND FALL OF
DARTH VADER

BY RYDER WINDHAM

SCHOLASTIC INC.

New York Toronto London Auckland Sydney Mexico City New Delhi Hong Kong Buenos Aires

If you purchased this book without a cover, you should be aware that this book is stolen property. It was reported as "unsold and destroyed" to the publisher, and neither the author nor the publisher has received any payment for this "stripped book."

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

ISBN-13: 978-0-439-68133-9

ISBN-10: 0-439-68133-2

Copyright © 2007 Lucasfilm Ltd. & TM. All Rights Reserved. Used Under Authorization.

Cover art by Drew Struzan

Design by Phil Falco

SCHOLASTIC and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

9 10 11 12 13 14/0

Printed in the U.S.A.

First printing, April 2009

For Ralph McQuarrie

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sincere thanks to the screenwriters of the *Star Wars* films: George Lucas, Lawrence Kasdan, Leigh Brackett, and Jonathan Hales. I am also in debt to Terry Brooks, James Luceno, Kilian Plunkett, Daniel Wallace, and the late Brian Daley and Archie Goodwin, whose respective *Star Wars* books, comics, and radio dramatizations provided material for various sequences in this novel. Special thanks to Dorothy Windham for research assistance, to Violet Windham for never letting me win a lightsaber fight, to Anne Windham for helping me in every way to make time to complete this book, and to *Star Wars* fans Titus DosRemedios and Peter Ricci for sharing their ideas and concerns about Darth Vader. As ever, big thanks to David Levithan at Scholastic, and to Jonathan Rinzler and Leland Chee at Lucasfilm.

STAR WARS
THE RISE AND FALL OF
DARTH VADER

PROLOGUE

Darth Vader, the Dark Lord of the Sith, was dreaming.

In his dream, he saw his own dark form standing upon the open terrace that clung to the curved outer wall of Bast Castle, his private fortress on the planet Vjun. Freezing acidic rain pelted his helmet, and high winds tore at his black cloak with incredible fury, as if the weather itself was doing its best to kill him along with anything else that attempted to live on the barren world. And yet Vader felt more alive than he had in years.

Turning from the balcony, he entered a vaulted doorway, leaving a trail of wet bootprints on the corridor floor. The walls were lined with automated heating vents that dried his garments as he strode to the dimly illuminated observatory. Although few had ever treaded within his fortress, he was not surprised to find the young man who stood at the center of the domed-ceiling chamber.

The young man was Luke Skywalker.

Clad in form-fitting black clothes, Luke had his back to Vader as he examined a three-dimensional star map that was suspended in the air above a holoprojector. Vader recognized the map as the Coruscant Sector. Luke's arms hung at his sides, and Vader noticed that Luke's right hand, clad in a black glove, was almost touching the lightsaber clipped to his belt.

A new lightsaber, Vader thought. And a new hand.

Silent as a shadow, Vader moved forward into the room.

Without acknowledging Vader, Luke raised his right arm into the holographic starfield. He moved his cybernetic fingers through the tiny, glittering orb that represented the planet Coruscant.

"The Emperor is dead," Luke said in a low voice. "All that was his is now yours."

"No, my son," Vader said. "The galaxy is *ours*."

Luke nodded and smiled. Vader was still facing Luke when a low, familiar voice muttered unexpectedly from behind, "You are both . . . wrong."

It was the voice of Emperor Palpatine. Vader saw Luke's expression become tense, but he did not turn to face the Emperor. Then the Emperor began to laugh.

A ring of fire erupted from the floor, surrounding Vader and cutting him off from Luke. Listening to his Master's cackle, Vader lowered his masked head and thought, *Why won't you die?*

The laughter continued. Luke said, “He *can't* be alive! Father, help me!”

Around Vader, the fire began to burn inward, moving closer toward his body. Behind his helmet, Vader tried to blot out the horrid laughter. *Why won't you ever die?*

But the laughter did not stop. Vader attempted to reach for his own lightsaber, but his arm suddenly felt like it was made of solid stone. The flames were now licking at his cloak and boots. The Emperor laughed louder. Luke began to scream.

Vader squeezed his eyes shut. He could smell fused circuits and roasting flesh.

WHY WON'T YOU EVER —?!

And then Vader awoke.

Darth Vader's eyes snapped open. Seated within his pressurized meditation chamber aboard his personal Super Star Destroyer, the *Executor*, his first waking thought was, *Jedi don't have nightmares*. This thought surprised him almost as much as the intensity of the imagery of Bast Castle. It had been over two decades since he had broken from the Jedi order to become a Sith Lord, and in all those years, he had not thought about whether Jedi had nightmares, or dreams for that matter. Not since the end of the Clone Wars.

Perhaps it was a premonition, Vader thought, as a vein pulsed against the left temple of his bare, horribly scarred head. He quickly rejected this notion. He knew

a premonition when he had one, knew that it was more than just a trick of the imagination mixing with subconscious desires. The vision of his fortress had been something else.

Perhaps a warning, but from whom? Vader considered the possibility that the vision had been planted in his mind by a skilled telepath. The idea that he might have been violated made him angry, and his anger opened him to the dark side of the Force. Closing his eyes, he reached out with the Force and searched for signs of psychic energy trails that might lead to a telepathic invader. He found nothing, no one. . . .

But the Emperor would not leave a trail.

Vader grimaced. A year had passed since his last encounter with Luke Skywalker on Cloud City, where he had revealed his identity to Luke and told him it was his destiny to destroy the Emperor. Vader suspected that the Emperor knew of this treachery, for the Emperor knew everything eventually. But even if the Emperor were aware of all that had transpired, Vader was certain he would not feel threatened. The Emperor was simply too powerful. And yet somehow, Vader sensed that the Emperor had nothing to do with his strange vision of Bast Castle.

Could it have been just a dream? Vader wasn't sure. After so many years without dreaming, he had forgotten what dreams were like.

Above his pale head, a retractable robotic arm held

his helmet close against the spherical chamber's ceiling. Dedicated servos lowered the helmet over his head and locked it onto his collar's hermetic seal. As his damaged lungs exhaled through his armored suit's life-support system, a deep hiss was emitted from his triangular respiratory vent.

The upper half of the meditation chamber lifted, exposing Vader like a black pistil at the center of a white mechanical flower. His seat rotated, allowing him to face a wide viewscreen, which flicked on to display the image of Admiral Piett on the *Executor*'s bridge.

Vader said, "Status report."

"The *Executor* is prepared to leave Coruscant's orbit," Piett replied, standing at attention in his gray uniform. Although his voice was alert, his eyes appeared tired from staring at sensor screens and navigational monitors. "I await your command."

"Set course for the Endor system," Vader said.

"As you wish, my lord." Piett's image vanished from the viewscreen.

It was definitely not a dream, Vader convinced himself without difficulty. *Dreams are for pathetic life-forms*. He stared at his own reflection on the surface of the viewscreen.

I am the nightmare.

With an imperceptible gesture, he reset the viewscreen to display the starfield that lay directly before the *Executor*'s bow. As he gazed at the distant stars on

the screen, a deeply buried memory pushed its way into his consciousness. It was the memory of a wish, a wish to visit every star in the galaxy. But that wish, and the dreams that went with it, had belonged to someone else, a child who lived a long time ago and was no more.

Those were the dreams of a boy named Anakin Skywalker.

CHAPTER ONE

Anakin Skywalker was dreaming.

In the dream, he was an older boy, but still years away from manhood. He was inside the open cockpit of a small repulsorlift vehicle, soaring over rocky terrain at an incredibly high speed. Two strong cables were secured to a parallel pair of long engines in front of the vehicle, and the gap between the engines was bridged by an arc of crackling energy. Anakin had never seen such a strange contraption, but somehow he knew how to handle it. As he pressed against a throttle lever and plunged into a high-walled ravine, he realized, *I'm a pilot!*

He wasn't alone. Several similar vehicles swerved through the ravine in front of him, and the noise of their engines, echoing off the rocky walls, was almost deafening.

It's a race!

With fearless precision, Anakin accelerated and whipped past the other vehicles. Out of the corners of

his eyes, he caught fleeting glimpses of his competition. Most were aliens he'd never seen before, but they all had alert, determined expressions and nimble fingers. Anakin had dreamed of other worlds before, but never anyplace like this.

Launching out of the ravine, Anakin led the other racers across a wide expanse of desert flats. Twin suns blazed in the sky, baking the hard sand so that the rising heat shimmered in the air and made distant rock formations appear to float above the planetary surface. In the distance, he sighted an enormous, open arena that was ringed by crowded grandstands and dome-topped towers. He knew the finish line was in that arena. Tightening his grip on the controls, he thought, *I'm going to win!*

Suddenly, his left engine began to shudder, violently jolting the cable that linked the engine to his vehicle. Anakin was struggling to maintain control when his right engine let out a loud whine, then both engines began to nose toward the ground. Anakin squirmed in his cockpit and cried, "*NO!*"

"It's all right, Ani," said his mother's voice.

And then Anakin Skywalker woke up.

The shuddering sensation and loud whine of an engine continued as Anakin opened his eyes. He was huddled beside his mother on a hard metal bench in a space freighter's cargo compartment, which was separated from the noisy engine room by a crisscross of

metal bars. The cargo hold was tightly packed with thirty other beings, aliens as well as humans; those who didn't have a seat on one of the four long benches either stood or crouched on the filthy floor.

Anakin looked up to his mother's pale, grime-covered face and said, "We're landing?"

"It feels like we are," Shmi Skywalker answered with a smile. She gently pushed Anakin's blond hair back from his forehead and gazed into his blue eyes. "You had a bad dream?"

Anakin thought for a moment, then said, "Not too bad." He wished the cargo hold had some kind of a window, or even a small viewscreen so he could see what was going on outside. "Know where we're going yet?"

"Not yet."

Before they had boarded the freighter, a crewman had explained that only paying passengers were allowed to know their destination in advance, and all others — for security reasons — would just have to wait. Shmi had hoped to make Anakin feel better about the situation by reminding him that she always liked surprises, but he sensed she was scared. She took his little hand in hers and said, "Just hold tight."

When the freighter stopped shaking and the engine's whine began to die, the cargo hold's occupants shifted out of their seats and up from the floor. Standing beside his mother while she strapped the ragged bag that contained their few belongings to her back, Anakin wished

he were taller so he wouldn't feel so crushed between all the adult bodies. He also wished for some fresh air, as the hold's single refresher had backed up and everyone, including himself, smelled awful. They'd been waiting for several minutes for the exit hatch to open when Shmi looked down at Anakin and said, "Do you want me to carry you?"

Anakin's legs weren't tired, but he nodded.

Moving carefully to avoid bumping the surrounding people, Shmi lifted her son and held him close against her chest. As he wrapped his small arms around her neck, he said, "Thanks."

"You're getting big," she told him. "It won't be long before you'll be carrying me."

"Really?"

Shmi laughed. "Don't worry, you're not growing *that* fast."

An older woman standing behind Shmi smiled at Anakin and asked, "How old are you?"

Anakin smiled back and held up three fingers. In fact, he wasn't certain that he was three years old, but he didn't want to admit that he didn't know.

The hatch finally opened and the compartment was instantly flooded by a blast of hot, dry air. Even those who had been eager to leave the cramped cargo hold were suddenly reluctant to walk down the ramp that led outside. The heat reminded Anakin of his dream. Moving his lips close to his mother's ear, he whispered, "Twin suns."

Before Shmi could ask what he was talking about, a voice from below shouted, “Come on, move it out!”

The people filed out of the freighter. They found themselves on a sandy stretch of land near a cluster of domed, low-level adobe structures. Air traffic indicated they had landed at the outskirts of a fairly busy spaceport. A few pedestrians were visible in the distance, moving slowly and keeping to the shade of the windowless buildings in an effort to avoid the blistering heat.

“Welcome back to Mos Espa, O mighty Gardulla,” a voice bellowed in thick Huttese. Anakin, still carried by his mother, turned his head to see the speaker was a green-skinned male Rodian who stood at the bottom of the ramp that extended from the freighter’s main hatch. While the Rodian made a sweeping bow, Gardulla the Hutt, the massive sluglike alien who had chartered the freighter, descended on a repulsorsled that glided down the ramp from the freighter’s main hatch. Gardulla immediately began issuing orders to her attendants. Anakin knew enough Huttese to comprehend that Gardulla was eager to see something called a Podrace.

Shmi set Anakin down on the ground. He squinted up at the sky and said, “See, Mom? Told you.”

Shmi followed his gaze to the two suns overhead, and then she understood what he’d said moments earlier. “*Twin suns*. Yes, I see.”

Anakin wanted to tell his mother about the dream he’d had, but they had to remain quiet as one of

Gardulla's attendants, a long-necked Anx, began to bark out instructions. The Anx pointed to Anakin, Shmi, and six other people, and said, "You'll be sharing living quarters at Gardulla's estate, here in Mos Epsa. Before you're escorted there, be aware your implanted transmitters have been set for —"

Anakin was wondering if *living quarters* meant more than one room when the Anx was interrupted by the loud report of a blaster pistol that sounded like it came from the nearby adobe buildings. At the sound of the shot, Anakin stood still while everyone else near the freighter flinched, ducked, or dived for cover behind the few cargo containers that had already been removed from the ship. Shmi threw her body protectively in front of her son, but he pushed his arms out, pressing away from her so he could see what was happening.

A reptilian humanoid bolted out from an alley between two adobe buildings and ran toward the freighter. As it drew closer, Anakin saw the runner was a lean Arcona with an anvil-shaped head and clear, marblelike eyes. A metal fetter with a long, broken chain was secured to the Arcona's right ankle, making a jangling sound as it whipped behind his running feet. A moment later, two blaster-wielding men jumped from the alley, and Anakin realized the Arcona was running for his life.

Seeing the men with blasters about to shoot in the direction of the freighter, Gardulla's Anx attendant bellowed in Huttese, "Hold your fire, you fools!" Then

he pointed a long, pointed finger at the fleeing Arcona and yelled to Gardulla's guards, "Stop him!"

The guards spread out quickly. Without breaking his pace, the Arcona elbowed a guard aside and dodged another. Anakin could see that the Arcona was trying to get away from his pursuers, but he had no idea where the Arcona was trying to go. Except for some low dunes, the surrounding land was almost entirely flat, with no other ships or vehicles in sight. *Nowhere to hide*, Anakin thought.

The Arcona's frightened eyes flicked toward Anakin, and the boy held his gaze. Anakin felt sorry for the Arcona and wished he could help. Then one of Gardulla's guards lunged forward and the Arcona sprinted away, moving past Anakin and the others. He was about two meters away from Anakin when his body erupted in a small explosion.

Anakin blinked as the Arcona's remains fell to the ground. He turned quickly to look at the two men who had chased the Arcona away from the buildings. Neither man had fired a blaster. Anakin was observant enough to realize that the Arcona had not been shot, and that some explosive device had detonated within him.

Shmi pulled Anakin close to her side and said, "Look away, Ani."

Anakin ignored her and kept his eyes on what was left of the Arcona. A few of the guards and the Anx attendant walked over to inspect the smoldering mess.

Noticing Anakin, the Anx turned his long, pointed chin to the boy and said, “That’s what happens to slaves who try to escape on Tatooine.”

Anakin felt his throat become painfully dry. No matter how often his mother reminded him that there were less fortunate beings in the galaxy, there was no denying the fact that they were both slaves, the property of Gardulla the Hutt.

Tatooine, thought Anakin. *Welcome to Tatooine.*