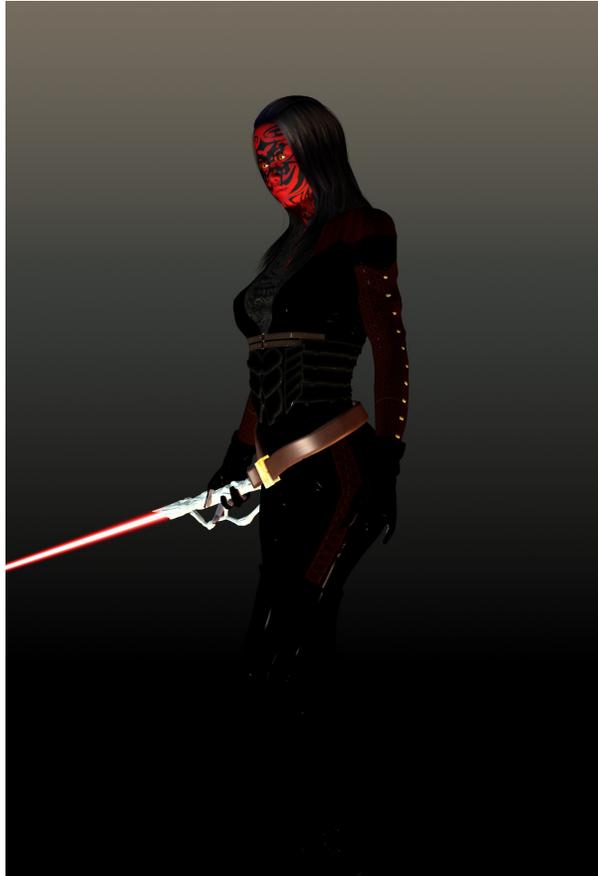


STAR WARS: Dark Epoch

by
Joe Mignano

{This is fan fiction only. This story takes place immediately prior to the events in STAR WARS: Dark Empire.}



Opening crawl:

Several years after the the Battle of Endor, the remnants of the Galactic Empire have regrouped and struck back against the fledgling New Republic, retaking the capitol world of Coruscant. The Empire, however, has been left in disarray with the sudden demise of Grand Admiral Thrawn. Imperial Moff's vie for power, and civil war within the Empire itself engulfs system after system.

The Rebel Alliance, now referred to as the New Republic, takes advantage of the Imperial infighting by sending military sorties in quick strikes against Imperial strongholds in key sectors of importance. One such raid is led by Luke Skywalker and Lando Calrissian aboard their captured and rechristened Star Destroyer, "Liberator," in an effort to sow even more confusion and panic among the Imperial forces fighting each other on the city-world of Coruscant...

{Music fades, scene is now aboard the Liberator, background ship noises can be heard}

Lando Calrissian stood at the bridge of the *Liberator*, hovering over a display console. “Signal the fleet and prepare to exit hyperspace on my mark. All ship-to-surface batteries prepare to commence bombardment of Imperial City,” he instructed a bridge officer. “Right away, General,” the bridge officer responded, as he quickly moved to carry out his orders.

A hooded figure stood in a darkened corner of the bridge, staring out one of the trans-parasteel viewports into the blue-voided emptiness of hyperspace. He stood stiffly, saying nothing. Lando turned to speak to him. “I've got a bad feeling about this one, Luke. One Star Destroyer and a bunch of cruisers against a reek's nest of who-knows-what they'll throw at us! This may be a simple hit-and-run attack, but we're gonna hafta run as soon as we start hitting, if we want to survive.”

Luke didn't move, and he made no sound at all. Lando stepped in front of Luke to speak to him directly. “What do you think? Do you see us getting out of this in one piece?”

Luke slowly opened his eyes, as if emerging from a trance. His face was emotionless. “What I see,” Luke said, “is darkness. Nothing but darkness.”

“Well,” Lando replied, facetiously. “I feel better already.”

Before the order was given to exit hyperspace, something made the *Liberator* do exactly that.

{Background ship sounds give way to sudden small explosion}

Suddenly, a small explosion could be heard, followed by the ship-wide echo of klaxon alarms.

“Sir!” a bridge officer called. “We have hull breaches across three decks, and we're venting atmosphere! Our main hyperdrive generator is offline.”

Lando raced toward a monitoring station, and methodically read aloud the data he interpreted on its screen. “Some kind of malfunction ripped us right out of hyperspace, damaging the *Liberator* in the process.”

He then began to call out orders. “All stop! Seal off those decks! Damage control teams to your stations!”

As the *Liberator* came to a complete stop in space, and crew members scurried frantically to repair their stricken vessel, Luke turned to see out of the viewport before him once again, this time at a brownish, incandescent world below. “And so it begins,” Luke muttered, before closing his eyes again, meditating on what was to come.

It made no sense. They were in the Galactic Core, which by now was rife with Imperial Remnant forces. Coruscant was below them. There was no sign, though, of the cruisers that comprised the rest of the fleet they came here with. There was no welcoming committee. The *Liberator* was a sitting duck, damaged and vulnerable to attack. But no attack came.

“All batteries commence bombardment of Imperial targets. Prepare to jump back to hyperspace using backup systems on my mark. Plot a different course. Whatever that was that pulled us out of the Correllian Trade Route, I don't want to run into it again. We'll take the Leisure Corridor.”

A bridge officer then spoke, bewilderment dominating his speech. "Sir, the planet surface appears to have already sustained heavy damage from orbital bombardment already."

Lando replied, "that's possible. The Empire has been in a state of civil war for some time now." He proceeded to the targeting scanners and examined the readouts. "...except that the entire landscape looks all wrong. Key landmarks like the Imperial palace aren't there, as if they weren't even built yet!"

Just then, the deck of the *Liberator* shuddered slightly. Another bridge officer called out. "We're under attack! A small unknown craft, about the size of a starfighter, is targeting our engines. Damage is negligible."

"Kreth!" Lando said in exasperation. He'd proven in the last war what one small ship could do to a vessel of immense size, however seemingly unlikely. "Open fire on that, that, whatever-it-is!"

"No," Luke said calmly. "Put a tractor beam on it, and bring it aboard in the main hangar bay." Luke turned to face his old friend. "It's alright."

Hesitantly, Lando agreed. If there was one thing he knew he could do well in all of this, he could trust Luke Skywalker. "Do as he says," Lando ordered his crew.

{Background ambiance now changes to hangar bay, similar to Death Star ambient sounds}

The small fighter was tractoried into the main hangar bay without incident; Luke and Lando were standing nearby with an escort of armed New Republic fleet troopers.

The vessel itself was of a curious design, similar looking in some respects to an imperial TIE-Interceptor. But this type of ship could not be found anywhere in the *Liberator's* databanks as a kind of starfighter recently manufactured. In fact, the only listings available for a class of ship like this one indicated that the small craft in the hangar bay should be more than four thousand years old. However, it was in pristine condition.

The cockpit hatch of the sleek ship opened, and a female human emerged. She appeared to be about twenty or so standard years. Her skin was of a purposefully altered crimson pigmentation; her face and upper body adorned in what appeared to be ceremonial tattoos. She wore a black flight suit that fit her snugly.

"Hello, what have we here?" Lando said, recalling the time he first met Princess Leia.

"She's a Force user," Luke answered.

Lowering the cowl of his cloak, Luke stepped forward, and opened himself in the Force. Immediately, the female fighter pilot before them hissed out a word, with audible disgust.

"*Jidai!*"

She then crouched into a combat ready stance, igniting the all-too-familiar sound of a lightsaber, the hilt of which was attached by a cable to the pilot's belt, and looked archaic to Luke. He wondered if it

was a proto-saber, early lightsabers used by the ancient Jedi. The blade of this one, however, was as red as the one used by his father. There was no mistaking it now, this was a Sith. A Sith from a long time ago.

Time, Luke thought. That had to be the key to all of this. A key that would open a door to Jedi of this era, as well as the Sith, like the one before him now. Luke now had the opportunity to learn about the Force from the masters of old. Even the mysteries of the dark side. If he could learn about why the dark side of the Force was so alluring, perhaps he could learn why his father, Anakin Skywalker, had turned to it. This was one door Luke wanted to step through.

His thoughts, however, were quickly interrupted, as a red lightsaber came charging at him in the blur of a split second. Instead of drawing his own saber, Luke force-jumped high into the air, somersaulting backwards, landing on his feet about ten or so meters away. The fleet troopers opened fire on the female attacker, and as Luke had assured himself before executing his somersault, she blocked or dodged every last one of their shots, forced to defend herself instead of going after her "*Jidai*" quarry. The blaster fire was so quick, she had no time to deflect any shots back to their shooters. She looked at Luke, finally realizing she'd been set up, and there was nothing she could do about it.

As she continued to block the incoming blaster bolts, Luke directed a Force-push at her which lifted her off of her feet, and pushed her backwards through the hangar bay until the back of her head hit a protruding fin of her starfighter, knocking her unconscious.

"Let's get her to the infirmary," Luke stated. "I'll go with you and keep personal watch over her."

Lando picked up the proto-saber from the deck of the hangar bay, handed it to Luke, and said, "Next time we think about tractor beaming a force-user aboard, let me know ahead of time, will ya?"

Luke stood in front of the captive force-user in the Liberator's infirmary, now under heavy guard, and looked at her. He was genuinely curious about her, nothing more. She, on the other hand, had awakened, her face full of anger and frustration, perhaps more about being unable to move on her ray-shielded medical stretcher, than the fact that she was now a Jedi prisoner. She looked back at Luke, her eyes amber-filled beacons of rage.

"*Qorit Nun*," she said.

Luke had never heard the language before, but through the Force, he understood that she wanted him to kill her. "I can't do that," Luke said. "I wish I knew how to explain that do you."

"I speak Basic, *jidai*," she replied instantly.

Luke said nothing in return, but held up her proto-saber, to indicate that it was now in his possession.

"An old trophy I took from your Temple, and made into a Sith weapon of my own," she said, realizing she may never use it again. "I took pleasure in slaughtering many of your kind with it."

"What is your name?" Luke asked.

She forced a short laugh, incredulous that Luke didn't seem to care about the many Jedi she claimed to

have killed. “I am Agoneia. Darth Agoneia,” she snickered, a wicked smile forming across her lips. “My master is Darth Angral, who now administrates this world in the name of the Emperor. You have an impressive ship, *Jidai*, but it will be no match against the Sith armada that will be returning shortly. You are doomed!”

Luke interjected. “The Emperor is dead. My father, who was once a Sith, destroyed him.”

Agoneia looked puzzled. She could sense through the Force that Luke wasn’t lying. “If the Emperor is dead, then there will be a new Emperor. And my master would know of it.”

That statement opened the door that Luke needed. “Take me to your master,” Luke said.

Luke persuaded Lando to remain in orbit with the *Liberator*, while he and Agoneia proceeded to the planet surface in her ship. Lando objected, of course, not believing that they had somehow been catapulted into the past. Still, all the evidence, including the readings from the planet surface, suggested that they were no longer in their own time.

“We’ll stay in orbit long enough to effect emergency repairs. But if there’s an ‘armada’ coming at us, then I’d like you back here before then, I don’t care what *time* it is,” Lando informed Luke, semi-sarcastically.

“I will be,” Luke replied, in a most assured tone.

{Background ambiance is now of a Coruscant city-scape}

Coruscant was definitely different. The Jedi Temple was in ruins, as Luke suspected, but it too looked different. The edifices that weren’t on fire and still stood in what should have been Imperial City were nowhere near as tall as the buildings of Luke’s period, and the skylanes were nearly devoid of speeder traffic. An occasional air speeder did pass by, and there were droids working to repair and rebuild much of the infrastructure that had been severely damaged, no doubt by the Sith that now ran things here.

Darth Agoneia landed her small craft on the rooftop of an office building, that of the former Supreme Chancellor of the Republic. Agoneia informed Luke during their decent to the planet surface that Angral assassinated Chancellor Berooken during a live holonet feed to the peace talks that were taking place on Alderaan, between the Jedi and the Sith. The assassination forced the Treaty of Coruscant to be signed. Coruscant was now a Sith world, and the Jedi had retreated to their homeworlds of Tython and Ossus.

Already, Luke was learning more about the Jedi of this period, and he hadn’t even seen one yet.

{Background ambiance changes again to Coruscant office or apartment building sounds}

Against her will, Agoneia led Luke to Darth Angral’s office chambers. As they entered, Angral stood up from his desk, and proclaimed, “Welcome, Agoneia. You’ve done well. And you, young Jedi. I have been expecting you.”

“You were?” Luke asked, uncertain how to react.

“Why, yes.” Darth Angral stated, clearly amused. “Did you honestly think that, with no Jedi left on this planet, that I could not sense the presence of a light-sider in orbit? Oh, I must admit you have quite a ship up there. A new Jedi capitol ship, perhaps? No matter. It and all of its secrets, just like this planet, just like YOU, now belong to ME.”

Angral let out a sinister laugh. “Why do I get the feeling that you’ve been in this kind of predicament before, and that you will be again?”

{Short, dark, ominous combat music added to background ambiance here}

Luke ignited his lightsaber, and Angral did the same. Agoneia smiled as she produced a short single-handed lightsaber hilt that was hidden within a hollowed out statue of an old Sith Lord nearby, presumably the very weapon of the dark lord the statue commemorated. They advanced on Luke, now forced once more to defend himself against two Sith, a master and an apprentice. Only this time, they both attacked him in unison.

“Soon I will be dead, and you with me,” Luke stated, as he fought with his saber in his mechanical hand. His free hand gripped a pouch on his belt, squeezed it once, then hurled a force blast at his adversaries as he jumped backwards into the air, rebounded off the walls, then held his saber in a ready position. The spirit of Master Yoda had taught Luke well about the Ataru technique, and it would serve him well this day.

{Music and ambiance fades, shipboard ambiance once again}

Aboard the Liberator, Lando stared in silent horror at the signal he was receiving. He finally said solemnly, “That’s the one message I hoped Luke *wouldn’t* send. Turbolaser batteries, FIRE!”

{cut to sounds of star destroyer turbo lasers firing in quick succession, then return to internal ship ambiance}

“Send a shuttle down there to pick up Luke, alive or otherwise.”

{No ambience, but slow and sad music plays softly in background}

Luke arose from a kneeling position, and the force shield he had erected around himself. He was surrounded by the fallen debris of the Chancellor’s office, and little else. Darth Angral was nowhere to be seen. Agoneia, on the other hand, was only a few meters away.

Using the Force, Luke removed a large pile of rubble under which Darth Agoneia had been buried. She was still alive, but her presence in the Force was fading. She looked at Luke and spoke slowly, blood spilling from her mouth.

“He is going to attack Tython. Others are going to Ossus. Go to your people, if you wish to learn more

about them, *future-jidai*.”

With that, Agoneia breathed her last.

A Lambda-class shuttle landed; Luke didn't need the Force to know it was from the Liberator. He climbed aboard, and said nothing.

{Music fades to star destroyer ambience again, ship ambience remains until the end}

Engineers aboard the Liberator figured out the cause for their temporal displacement, or, accidental time travel. While they were traveling at hyper-light speed, a key component in the main motivator had failed, but not completely, causing a wormhole effect. Hyper-light travel through the wormhole, which occurred in the hyperspace lane they were using, didn't cause them to veer off course, but it did cause them to be hurled backwards in time. They were reasonably certain that they could duplicate the process with the backup motivator and generator systems on board, but it would have to be precise; they would only have one shot at getting back. And Lando had no intention of sticking around.

Luke's shuttle landed in the hangar bay, as a massive fleet of outdated fighters and capitol ships exited hyperspace nearby, and immediately opened fire on the Liberator. The Sith armada. The individual laser hits to the Liberator did little damage, as energy weapons of this period were efficient, but way underpowered. Ballistic weapons were also being used, to no effect. Then, the Liberator shuddered as the enemy fighters started crashing their ships into it. That did considerable damage.

“It's now or never,” Lando said, and gave the order for the backup hyperdrive system to take them home.

{Add adventurous music to ship ambience from here until the end}

Taking his place at the same trans-paristeel viewport he stood at when their adventure through time began, Luke stared out into hyperspace for a little while, then real space, and then the view of Coruscant as it should look. Luke could see Imperial cruisers and walkers on the planet surface fighting each other; the Liberator re-entered normal space too close to the atmosphere, and they were crashing, taking on hits from forces belonging to a divided Galactic Empire in the process.

Liberator was doomed. Lando walked back over to Luke to say his good-byes, only to find Luke in a meditative state once more. The crashing ship had stopped falling uncontrollably from the sky, and was now gliding gracefully towards the ground in a controlled decent, but not under the control of any system aboard. This was the work of a Jedi Master.

They managed to get off an emergency transmission to the New Republic stronghold at Pinnacle Base, before a controlled crash-landing right in the middle of Imperial City. They touched down hard, and there were a few minor injuries, but all aboard Liberator survived. Now, it was a matter of holding out against Imperial factions until help arrived.

For Luke Skywalker though, the adventure had just begun. He didn't know if he would make it to Tython, or Ossus, but he knew the Force led him here for a reason; he could feel it. Luke set out, this time with his faithful astromech R2-D2, and headed toward the dark mystery that called out to him in the Force.

END

CREDITS:

STAR WARS: Dark Epoch

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The role of Darth Agoneia was voiced by Teresa Logan.

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