

Remnant: Force Heretic I (Star Wars: The New Jedi Order)

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Aboard the Jade Shadow, Luke, his wife Mara, Jacen Solo, and other Jedi head off into the Unknown Regions, where rumors and clues suggest Zonama Sekot might be found. Yet the mission has barely begun when the searchers stumble into a horrific battle. The Imperial Remnant, in retreat from the mighty Yuuzhan Vong, is about to be destroyed. It would seem those aboard the Jade Shadow have little choice but to leave the Empire to its fate. But these are no ordinary space travelers, they are Jedi. . . .

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap
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About the Author
Sean Williams is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling and award-winning author of more than seventy published short stories and thirty novels, including *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed* and *Star Wars: The Old Republic: Fatal Alliance*. He is a judge for the Writers of the Future contest, which he won in 1993. He is also a multiple winner of Australia's speculative fiction awards and is the recipient of both the Ditmar and the Aurealis for *The Crooked Letter*, marking the first time in the history of the awards that a fantasy novel has won both. Williams lives with his wife, Amanda, in Adelaide, South Australia.

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INTERSECTION

Three Months Later

"I say we fight on!"

The voice echoed through the vast, domed hall that was serving as a replacement for the Grand Convocation Chamber on Coruscant, where the Senate had previously met. With Coruscant currently in the hands of the Yuuzhan Vong, Mon Calamari had been selected as a temporary capital and now played host to the representatives of the Galactic Alliance-a group much smaller than a full meeting of the Senate had once been, before the Yuuzhan Vong invasion, but still several hundred strong.

They responded to the call to fight in the fashion preferred by their individual species. There were whistles, grunts, shrieks, and subsonic rumbles. Some waved appendages; others stamped their feet. And others still, Leia Organa Solo among them, remained silent. She stood completely motionless, gently extending herself into the Force to feel it crackle and flare from the conflicting emotions of those gathered around her.

The speaker, a sour-faced Sullustan by the name of Niuk Niuv, paced the floor with an energy that belied his size. Clearly agitated by the sudden commotion, he lifted one hand to his ear to indicate his discomfort, while the other attempted to motion the crowd to silence. Even with his audio dampeners in place, the level of noise around the hall still hurt his sensitive ears.

"We have them on the back foot," he said, his large black eyes roaming the assembly. "They are overextended and ill prepared to defend themselves. They didn't expect to have to defend themselves so late in the game-which is precisely why we must drive home this advantage! To ignore the opportunity we have been given would be like putting our collective head back on the chopping block!"

"And who took it off the block in the first place?" The call came from the far side of the chamber. Leia immediately recognized the voice as belonging to Thuv Shinev of the Tion Hegemony.

Niuk Niuv's face contorted into a fleshy snarl. "That is irrelevant," he said irritably.

"Really?" Shinev bellowed. "I wouldn't have thought so. Too long have some among us treated the Jedi with contempt and suspicion. If we do have the chance now, finally, to force the Yuuzhan Vong back, then we should at least acknowledge their opinions on the subject!"

"If you think it necessary, then by all means thank them," the Sullustan retaliated. "I'm not saying they don't deserve that. But to do anything less than strike back at the Yuuzhan Vong would be madness, no matter what the Jedi say! We must prove to the Vong that we cannot be subjugated and will not tolerate their oppression! They have done enough. It is time for us to show them who this galaxy really belongs to! We must strike back hard, and we must do it now."

A scattered cheer rose up among the Senators. It was loud, but not as deafening as Leia had feared it might be. After so many crushing defeats, most of the representatives remained uncertain that the Yuuzhan Vong could be rolled back as easily as Niuk Niuv stated. But the willingness to try was undeniable.

As Leia's gaze swept the crowd, she caught the tall, long-faced figure of Kenth Hamner on the far side of the chamber. From the scowl on the Jedi Master's face, Leia felt sure he was about to speak out against Niuk Niuv. But it was another who voiced their concerns.

"What if you're right?" Leia identified Releqy A'Kla, daughter of Camaasi Senator Elegos A'Kla, who had been ritually murdered by the Yuuzhan Vong's Commander Shedao Shai in the early days of the war. Since she had already served in his stead during his absence, her people had voted her into her father's position for the duration of the crisis. "What if we can beat them?"

"Then we win!" Niuk Niuv's big, round eyes were bright with anticipated glory.

"But at what cost?" A'Kla's fine, golden down shivered with intense emotion. "The Yuuzhan Vong fight to the death, Senator. Admiral Ackbar used this very fact against them at Ebaq Nine. I don't think you truly realize what this means."

"I realize," the Sullustan said. "And I realize that it is not our responsibility. If the positions were reversed, they would undoubtedly do the same to us."

"I'm sorry, but my people cannot support such extermination under any circumstances," she said. She brought her long, three-fingered hands up to her chest. "We are pacifists, Senator. We do not wish such horrors on our consciences."

"And I respect your people's ethics," Niuk Niuv replied. Turning from her to address the entire chamber, he continued: "If there was an alternative, then I would consider it. But in the absence of any such alternative, I am not prepared to sit back with my neck out waiting for the Yuuzhan Vong to bring an amphistaff down

upon it!"

Another cheer rippled around the room.

"It's all very good for the pacifists to argue about compassion and restraint, but it is they who will benefit from the ultimate peace that we will bring about with our actions!" Niuv faced Releqy A'Kla once again. "What good is pacifism if you are dead, Senator?"

Releqy A'Kla sank back into her chair, blinking in dismay.

"We will crush the Yuuzhan Vong," Niuk Niuv concluded to the Galactic Alliance representatives gathered, punching a fist into the air. "And we will send their remains back where they came from!"

The cheer was louder this time. Leia's fellow Alderaanian, Chief of State Cal Omas, said nothing. It would have been pointless at this stage, with the majority now so evidently behind Niuk Niuv's sentiments.

Across from her, Leia saw Hamner's scowl deepen as he shook his head and slipped silently from the huge hall.

"Finally, we are vindicated."

In a room not far from the domed hall in which the Senators met, a gathering of Jedi Knights and Masters looked similarly reduced in numbers but was no less passionate. Jedi Master Luke Skywalker had called the meet- ing to discuss strategies for the coming stages of the war with the Yuuzhan Vong. Waxarn Kel, the current speaker, paced in front of the gathering like a caged howlrunner. His face and hairless scalp were pink with fresh scars, indicating just how close he had come to being another victim of the Yuuzhan Vong anti-Jedi vendetta.

"Explain," Luke said. He sat on the stage at the front of the chamber, one knee raised to support the elbow of his right arm, and that hand supporting his chin. The unnatural coolness of the hand's artificial skin against his jaw helped keep his head clear.

Kel looked up at him with a frown. "Do I really need to?" he asked with a mix of irritation and surprise. Then, to the rest of the Jedi, he said, "We've been slandered, hunted, and butchered from one side of the galaxy to the other. We became the scapegoat for everything the New Republic brought upon itself because of its complacency and inability to act. We told them things they didn't want to hear, and what was our reward? We were damned for it, that's what. But now we have been vindicated. The trap on Ebaq Nine and the defeat of the Yuuzhan Vong have shown that we are a force to be reckoned with. Vergere's sacrifice will not be in vain."

"I hadn't realized that our fight was with the survivors of the New Republic," said Kyp Durron, leaning in flight uniform against one of the chamber's fluted walls, arms folded across his chest. "I thought our battle was with the Yuuzhan Vong."

"It is." Kel regarded Kyp with some annoyance. "The Yuuzhan Vong are our enemy-not just of every peaceful citizen of the galaxy, but of the Jedi in particular. That's been the frustrating thing about this war. The New Republic has thwarted our every attempt to defend ourselves. If it wasn't the Peace Brigade actually trapping us and selling us over, it was idiots like Borsk Fey'lya holding us back. Well, now we're free to act, and we can show them just what we are capable of doing!"

"I presume you have something in mind." Kyp's expression was neutral, but Luke sensed a cautious interest lurking behind it-like that of someone poking at a bug's nest with a stick to see what might emerge.

"Of course," Kel said. "We strike, and we strike hard."

"The Yuuzhan Vong?"

"Of course the Yuuzhan Vong!" Kel's eyes flashed anger. "We must act to ensure that public opinion doesn't turn against us once again."

"How might it do that, Waxarn?" Luke asked.

Kel glanced back up at Luke. The Master could feel the scarred young Jedi Knight consciously bringing his emotions into line.

"I fear it could happen all to easily, Master," he said, bowing slightly. "Unless we act decisively to reaffirm our usefulness and goodwill, to prove beyond the slightest doubt that the war can only be won with our assistance, then we risk looking weak. Or worse, looking as if our loyalty to the Galactic Alliance is weak."

Luke smiled sagely. "Surely our loyalty is to peace."

"First and foremost, yes, Master," Kel put in quickly. "But you have to be strong to protect peace from those who would destroy it. Sometimes it is necessary to fight in order to bring an end to fighting. Isn't that the way of the Jedi?"

Is it? Luke asked himself as he pondered the words of the young man before him. Luke himself had acted more than once on the philosophy espoused by Waxarn Kel and those like him. The cry had been taken up several times throughout the war with the Yuuzhan Vong by those tempted to take the seemingly easy route through the dark side rather than brave the ambiguities of the Force.

Luke didn't think Kel had fallen to the dark side, though. There was none of the anger and hatred in the young man that Luke could sense in a handful of others presently around him. They remained quiet, allowing Kel to speak their words for them. But it wasn't difficult for Luke to read their feelings. So many had been hurt by the Yuuzhan Vong and the Peace Brigaders that desiring retribution was, perhaps, only natural. Natural wasn't necessarily right, though, and part of Luke's job was to ensure that those in his charge weren't led astray.

None of the Jedi in the room had yet fallen to the dark side, and for that he was thankful. Some of them had taken a wrong turning here and there, just as some were being tempted to do now. But Luke had faith in all of them-even those who disagreed vehemently with his own opinions. He was sure that the collective wisdom of the Jedi, their strong belief in the healing, sustaining energies of the Force, would gradually assuage the grief they all felt for loved ones who had died in the war-as well as for themselves.

Luke straightened and dropped down onto the floor of the room to face Waxarn Kel. Once considered handsome, he was now scarred almost beyond recognition. And it was from this that Luke felt the man's emotions stemmed. Every time Kel looked in the mirror, he would be reminded of what the war had done to him and those he loved, and his anger and hatred would grow.

The dark side can beckon to us from so many quarters, Luke thought.

Users Review

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