

STAR WARS®

THE NEW JEDI ORDER



MARK TIDE I **ONSLAUGHT**

MICHAEL A. STACKPOLE



THE NEW JEDI ORDER

**DARK TIDE
ONSLAUGHT**

MICHAEL A. STACKPOLE



A Del Rey® Book

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**Don't miss the beginning
of The New Jedi Order
series, which begins
with VECTOR PRIME,
by R. A. Salvatore!**

They had been living on the very edge of disaster for so very long, fighting battles, literally, for decades, running from bounty hunters and assassins. Even the first time Han and Leia had met, on the Death Star, of all places, and in the gallows of the place, to boot! So many times, it seemed, one or more of them should have died.

And yet, in a strange way, that close flirting with death had only made Han think them all the more invulnerable. They could dodge any blaster, or piggy-back on the side of an asteroid, or climb out a garbage chute, or . . .

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LETHAL HERITAGE

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NATURAL SELECTION

ASSUMPTION OF RISK

BRED FOR WAR

MALICIOUS INTENT

GRAVE COVENANT

PRINCE OF HAVOC

DEMENTIA

A GATHERING EVIL

EVIL ASCENDING

EVIL TRIUMPHANT

ONCE A HERO

TALION: REVENANT

EYES OF SILVER

A HERO BORN

AN ENEMY REBORN

WOLF AND RAVEN

STAR WARS: ROGUE SQUADRON

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STAR WARS: THE KRYTOS TRAP

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STAR WARS: NEW JEDI ORDER: DARK TIDE ONSLAUGHT

STAR WARS: NEW JEDI ORDER: DARK TIDE RUIN

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DEDICATION

To Timothy Zahn

For all the obvious reasons, and a few more.
(Next time we're in Tasmania, I want to try driving.)

UNKNOWN REGIONS

SSI-RUUK STAR CLUSTER
BAKURA
ENDOR
VARONAT
BESPIN
HOTI
TSON

INNER CORE
ENDOR

CORUSCANT
KORNAKT CLUSTER
DEEP CORE
WORLD'S
DURO
COLONIES
RIM

ORD
MANTELL
ANOBIS
VORTEX
BILBRINGT
REECEE
ALDERAN
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COMMENOR
CORELLIA
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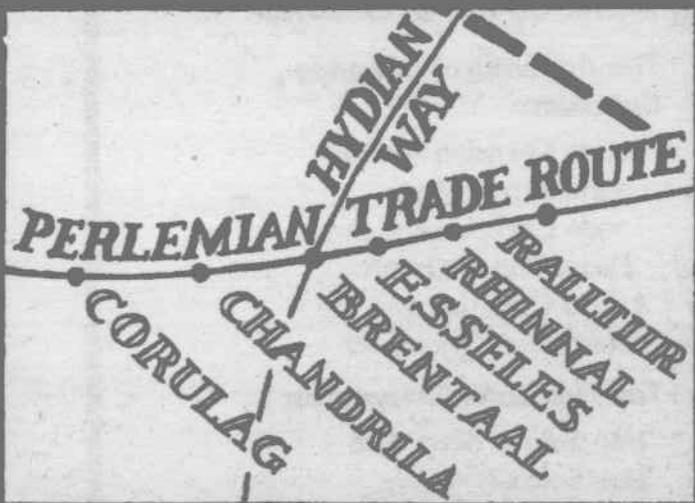
EXPANSION REGION
MID RIM

SENEX
JUVEX
SECTORS
ELROOD
SECTOR
KATHOL
SECTOR

RIMMA TRADE ROUTE
SULLUST
ERLADU
CLAK'DOR VII
SLUIS VAN
DAGOBAH
MINOS CLUSTER

UMGUL
NABOO
ZHAR
ALZOC III

CORELLIAN RUN
RODIA
BOTHAN
SPACE
BOTHANWUI
ROON
OUTER
TATOOINE
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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- Elegos A'Kla; New Republic senator (male Caamasi)
Lando Calrissian; Dubrillion planetary administrator (male human)
Colonel Gavin Darklighter; Rogue Squadron (male human)
Borsk Fey'lya; New Republic chief of state (male Bothan)
Corran Horn; Jedi Knight (male human)
Danni Quee; ExGal Society (female human)
Ganner Rhysode; Jedi Knight (male human)
Shedao Shai; Yuuzhan Vong Commander
Luke Skywalker; Jedi Master (male human)
Mara Jade Skywalker; Jedi Knight (female human)
Anakin Solo; Jedi Knight (male human)
Jacen Solo; Jedi Knight (male human)
Jaina Solo; Jedi Knight (female human)
Leia Organa Solo; New Republic diplomat (female human)

PROLOGUE

Standing there, on the bridge of his Nebulon-B frigate, the pirate Urias Xhaxin clasped his cybernetic left hand to the small of his back with his right hand. He stared straight ahead at the tunnel of light into which his ship, the *Free Lance*, flew. Given the nature of the frigate's design, with the bridge far forward, he felt as if he were flying there alone, making his way deep into the territory of the Outer Rim where no one in his right mind would be found.

He glanced back over his shoulder at the Twi'lek working the navigation station. "Time to reversion, Khwir?"

The Twi'lek's long lekku twitched. "Five minutes."

Xhaxin turned on the comlink clipped to his jacket's collar. "All hands, all hands, this is Xhaxin. Red and Blue Squadrons, prepare for launch. You will be moving to the outbound vectors and disabling the smaller yachts. Gunners, we will aim for the escorts. Everyone look sharp and this may be the last run we ever need make. In and out, clean and easy. You'll all do well, I know. Xhaxin out."

A dark-haired woman stepped up beside Xhaxin. "You really think this haul will earn us enough to retire?"

"It depends upon the quality of retirement you desire, Dr. Karl." The white-haired, white-bearded man turned and smiled at her. "Your skills will earn you a good living almost anywhere in the New Republic, and your share of this raid should be enough to buy you a new identity or two."

Anet Karl frowned. "Ever since the peace between the Imperial Remnant and the New Republic six years ago, we've been forced to go after smaller and smaller targets. The New Republic never condoned what we did, but they turned a blind eye to it while the Imperials were still a threat. Pickings were good as unreconstructed Imperials fled out here to the Remnant, but that trade has been trickling off. Is this raid going to be different?"

Xhaxin pursed his lips for a moment, then lowered his voice. "It's a fair question you ask. The answer is yes, I can feel it in my bones. This raid will be like nothing we've seen in the last five years."

Anet smiled mischievously, her brown eyes sparkling. "You're not going Jedi on me, are you? The Force tells you about this raid?"

"No, I'm far more practical than the Jedi, and more dangerous, too." He spread his arms. "We've nearly nine hundred crew on this ship—nine times the number of Jedi in the whole of the galaxy. And while they have the Force to aid them, I have two powerful allies with me: greed and arrogance."

"Oh, your plan was good."

"Correction, my plan was brilliant." Xhaxin laughed. "We let a couple of ships go free because they're traveling together, then I set up a guy who says he can organize convoys through deep space to the Remnant. We had people demanding positions in our convoy. In fact, they paid well for the privilege of traveling safely."

"But no refunds, correct?" The doctor smiled. "The credits they've spent are just a down payment?"

"Exactly. They gathered at Garqi, have headed out, and the last of them should be hitting the rendezvous point in ten minutes. We'll round up what's already there, then pick off the last one and go." Xhaxin smoothed his mustache with his flesh-and-blood right hand. "It's been a grand run. This last raid—it will be remembered. I would have had history recall me in other ways, but this will be good enough, especially if all of you can be rewarded for your hard work."

Anet Karl looked at the various humans and aliens busy at their duty stations on the bridge. "We had no love lost on the Empire either, Captain. We owe you our thanks for keeping us alive and allowing us to pay them back all these years. We'd keep going, too—"

"I know, but the New Republic has made peace with the Remnant." Xhaxin sighed. "One cannot underestimate the allure of peace. I think, perhaps, we've finally earned some ourselves."

"Ten seconds to reversion, Captain."

"Thank you, Khwir." Xhaxin waved a hand toward the viewport. "Behold, Doctor, our destiny."

The tunnel of light shattered into countless stars of varying hues. They'd come out into the middle of nowhere, literally—a point in space that had been selected only because gravitational forces made it perfect for speeding the way from Garqi to Bastion in the Imperial Remnant. *This place is supposed to be empty.*

Empty it was not. Aside from the burning wreckage of a twisted freighter spinning madly, life pods and yachts darting about, a large object hung there in space. Xhaxin thought at first it had to be an asteroid because of its appearance, uneven surface, and torpid pace. Other smaller asteroids seemed to orbit around it, then streaked out on attack runs on the yachts.

And now they're orienting on us! Xhaxin spun away from the viewport. "Full shields up, now! Deploy the fighters. I don't know how some fool managed to fit a hyperdrive core to an asteroid, but he's not stealing our ships! Gunnery, get a firing solution on that big rock and open it up."

"As ordered, Captain!"

Even as he issued orders and pondered making a planetoid somehow mobile, Xhaxin knew that that line of reasoning did not explain the smaller rocks that moved like starfighters. "Sensors, what's going on out there?"

A Duros looked up through holographic displays of data, his long face wearing an expression that was even more morose than usual. "Gravitic anomalies, sir, everywhere."

"Tractor beams? Gravity-well generators?"

“Different, sir.” The Duros frowned as a wash of data filled his holograph with overlapping spheres of color. “Focused, tighter beams, more powerful.”

The *Free Lance*'s turbolaser batteries opened up, sending long streams of sizzling red bolts at the asteroid. The shots looked to be on target, then deviated sharply in their flight. The bolts sharpened their angle of attack, coming together nearly half a kilometer before they hit the asteroid. Xhaxin expected the beams to flash through that new focal point and still hit the target, but instead they vanished.

“What happened? Guns, sensors, what happened?”

His gunner, an Iotran named Mirip Pag, shook his head in disbelief. “We had firing solutions, Captain. We were on target.”

The Duros, Lun Deverin, stabbed a quivering finger at a small sphere in a holograph. “A gravitic anomaly pulled the shots in. It's as if they're using a black hole to shield themselves.”

Xhaxin turned to look at the data and watched as the sphere in question expanded and moved toward the frigate. At the moment of contact, a jolt ran through the ship. Alarms began to sound, announcing that the starboard shield had collapsed.

“Come about to a heading of 57 mark 12, ahead full. Shear off whatever that beam is.”

“Another one coming in, Captain. It will take the aft shield . . .”

Pen Grasha, the *Free Lance*'s starfighter control officer, shouted above the warning sirens. “Captain, our fighters are having their shields stripped. Their blasters and lasers are not getting through to the enemy.”

The Duros waved a hand, then grabbed his sensor station in a tight grip. “Brace for impact. They've fired upon us.”

Impact? Xhaxin turned toward the viewport and saw a sizzling golden ball of something—plasma?—flash past. It caught the frigate in midmaneuver, hitting just port of center. The port shield caught the blast, but collapsed in seconds, sending a shower of sparks through the bridge and skittering

one crewman across the floor. A heartbeat later whatever had gotten through the shield slammed into the *Free Lance's* armored hull.

Thank goodness we have extra armor. Xhaxin had devoted a lot of resources to reinforcing the armor on the frigate. It had stood up to shots from an Imperial Star Destroyer before, and they'd lived to tell about it. *We also ran away so we could tell about it.*

The impact momentarily knocked the ship's artificial gravity generators out of phase, so Xhaxin flew from his feet and into Dr. Karl. Within a second, gravity returned, dropping both of them to the deck, but neither landed too hard. Xhaxin rose to one knee and helped the doctor up into a sitting position as he turned to look at the Duros. "What was that?"

"I don't know, Captain, but it's still eating into the hull." The blue-skinned alien paled. "I project a hull breach on deck seven in twenty seconds."

"Evac the area and close the bulkheads."

"More shots incoming!"

No! This can't be happening! Xhaxin's hands, both flesh and metal, convulsed into fists. He pushed aside the despair and panic raging through him. *Time to be the sort of man that causes a crew to be so loyal.*

"Pen, recall our fighters. Load those without hyperdrives first. Khwir, plot me a jump out of here."

The Twi'lek's lekku palsied. "The gravitic anomalies are constantly shifting. Calculating a jump solution is impossible."

"Are they enough to prevent us from jumping?"

"No, but—"

Xhaxin snarled, then staggered to a knee as another shot from the asteroid shook the frigate. "Then jump blind. Send the coordinates to our fighters, but jump blind."

"Captain, a blind jump could kill us."

"A blind jump *might* kill us." Xhaxin stabbed a finger at the viewport. "They *will* kill us. Do it, Khwir, do it, *now!*"

"As ordered, Captain." The Twi'lek started punching