



Dynasty of Evil (Star Wars: Darth Bane, Book 3)

By Drew Karpysyn

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Twenty years have passed since Darth Bane, reigning Dark Lord of the Sith, demolished the ancient order devoted to the dark side and reinvented it as a circle of two: one Master to wield the power and pass on the wisdom, and one apprentice to learn, challenge, and ultimately usurp the Dark Lord in a duel to the death. But Bane's acolyte, Zannah, has yet to engage her Master in mortal combat and prove herself a worthy successor. Determined that the Sith dream of galactic domination will not die with him, Bane vows to learn the secret of a forgotten Dark Lord that will assure the Sith's immortality—and his own.

A perfect opportunity arises when a Jedi emissary is assassinated on the troubled mining planet Doan, giving Bane an excuse to dispatch his apprentice on a fact-finding mission—while he himself sets out in secret to capture the ancient holocron of Darth Andeddu and its precious knowledge. But Zannah is no fool. She knows that her ruthless Master has begun to doubt her, and she senses that he is hiding something crucial to her future. If she is going to claim the power she craves, she must take action now.

While Bane storms the remote stronghold of a fanatical Sith cult, Zannah prepares for her Master's downfall by choosing an apprentice of her own: a rogue Jedi cunning and cold-blooded enough to embrace the Sith way and to stand beside her when she at last wrests from Bane the mantle of Dark Lord of the Sith.

But Zannah is not the only one with the desire and power to destroy Darth Bane. Princess Serra of the Doan royal family is haunted by memories of the monstrous Sith soldier who murdered her father and tortured her when she was a child. Bent on retribution, she hires a merciless assassin to find her tormentor—and bring him back alive to taste her wrath.

Only a Sith who has taken down her own Master can become Dark Lord of the Sith. So when Bane suddenly vanishes, Zannah must find him—possibly even rescue him—before she can kill him. And so she pursues her quarry from the grim depths of a ravaged world on the brink of catastrophe to the barren reaches of a desert outpost, where the future of the dark side's most powerful disciples will be decided, once and for all, by the final, fatal stroke of a lightsaber.

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Editorial Review

Review

"It's a testament to how strong the writing and characters are that I was unable to predict how it would end, even up to the very last page... Works perfectly in rounding off the loose ends from the first two books, whilst also leaving enough room to continue, with plenty of Star Wars action along the way. 9/10"
Emotionally Fourteen

About the Author

Drew Karpyshyn is the *New York Times* bestselling author of **Star Wars: Darth Bane: Rule of Two**, **Star Wars: Darth Bane: Path of Destruction**, and the Mass Effect novels **Revelation** and **Ascension**, as well as several other fantasy and science fiction novels. He is also an award-winning writer/designer for the computer game company BioWare, where he was lead writer on *Mass Effect* and the blockbuster *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic* video game. He lives in Canada's hinterlands with his wife, Jen, and their cat.

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Chapter One

". . . adhering to the rules established through the procedures outlined in the preceding, as well as all subsequent, articles. Our sixth demand stipulates that a body of . . ."

Medd Tandar rubbed a long-fingered hand across the pronounced frontal ridge of his tall, conical cranium, hoping to massage away the looming headache that had been building over the last twenty minutes.

Gelba, the being he had come to the planet of Doan to negotiate with, paused in the reading of her petition to ask, "Something wrong, Master Jedi?"

"I am not a Master," the Cerean reminded the self-appointed leader of the rebels. "I am only a Jedi Knight." With a sigh he dropped his hand. After a moment's pause he forced himself to add, "I'm fine. Please continue."

With a curt nod, Gelba resumed with her seemingly endless list of ultimatums. "Our sixth demand stipulates that a body of elected representatives from the mining caste be given absolute jurisdiction over the following eleven matters: One, the determination of wages in accordance with galactic standards. Two, the establishment of a weekly standard of hours any given employee can be ordered to work. Three, an approved list of safety apparel to be provided by . . ."

The short, muscular human woman droned on, her voice echoing strangely off the irregular walls of the underground cave. The other miners in attendance—three human men and two women crowding close to Gelba—were seemingly transfixed by her words. Medd couldn't help but think that, should their tools ever fail, the miners could simply use their leader's voice to cut through the stone.

Officially, Medd was here to try to end the violence between the rebels and the royal family. Like all Cereans, he possessed a binary brain structure, allowing him to simultaneously process both sides of a conflict. Theoretically, this made him an ideal candidate to mediate and resolve complex political situations

such as the one that had developed on this small mining world. In practice, however, he was discovering that playing the part of a diplomat was far more trying than he had first imagined.

Located on the Outer Rim, Doan was an ugly, brown ball of rock. More than 80 percent of the planetary landmass had been converted into massive strip-mining operations. Even from space, the disfigurement of the world was immediately apparent. Furrows five kilometers wide and hundreds of kilometers long crisscrossed the torn landscape like indelible scars. Great quarries hewn from the bedrock descended hundreds of meters deep, irreparable pockmarks on the face of the planet.

From within the smog-filled atmosphere, the ceaseless activity of the gigantic machines was visible. Excavation equipment scurried back and forth like oversized insects, digging and churning up the dirt. Towering drilling rigs stood on mechanical legs, tunneling to previously unplumbed depths. Gigantic hovering freighters cast shadows that blotted out the pale sun as they waited patiently for their cavernous cargo holds to be filled with dirt, dust, and pulverized stone.

Scattered across the planet were a handful of five-kilometer-tall columns of irregular, dark brown stone several hundred meters in diameter. They jutted up from the ravaged landscape like fingers reaching for the sky. The flat plateaus atop these natural pillars were covered by assemblages of mansions, castles, and palaces overlooking the environmental wreckage below.

The rare mineral deposits and rampant mining on Doan had turned the small planet into a very wealthy world. That wealth, however, was concentrated almost exclusively in the hands of the nobility, who dwelled in the exclusive estates that towered above the rest of the planet. Most of the populace was made up of Doan society's lower castes, beings condemned to spend their lives engaged in constant physical labor or employed in menial service positions with no chance of advancement.

These were the beings Gelba represented. Unlike the elite, they made their homes down on the planet's surface in tiny makeshift huts surrounded by the open pits and furrows, or in small caverns tunneled down into the rocky ground. Medd had been given a small taste of their life the instant he stepped from the climate-controlled confines of his shuttle. A wall of oppressive heat thrown up from the barren, sun-scorched ground had enveloped him. He'd quickly wrapped a swatch of cloth around his head, covering his nose and mouth to guard against the swirling clouds of dust that threatened to choke the air from his lungs.

The man Gelba had sent to greet him also had his face covered, making communication all the more difficult amid the rumbling of the mining machines. Fortunately, there was no need to speak as his guide led him across the facility: the Jedi had simply gawked at the sheer scope of the environmental damage.

They had continued in silence until reaching a small, rough-hewn tunnel. Medd had to crouch to avoid scraping his head on the jagged ceiling. The tunnel went for several hundred meters, sloping gently downward until it emerged in a large natural chamber lit by glow lamps.

Tool marks scored the walls and floor. The cavern had been stripped of any valuable mineral deposits long before; all that remained were dozens of irregular rock formations rising up from the uneven floor, some less than a meter high, others stretching up to the ceiling a full ten meters above. They might have been beautiful had they not all been the exact same shade of dull brown that dominated Doan's surface.

The makeshift rebel headquarters was unfurnished, but the high ceiling allowed the Cerean to finally stand up straight. More importantly, the underground chamber offered some small refuge from the heat, dust, and noise of the surface, enabling them all to remove the muffling cloth covering their faces. Given the shrillness

of Gelba's voice, Medd was debating if this was entirely a good thing.

"Our next demand is the immediate abolition of the royal family, and the surrender of all its estates to the elected representatives specified in item three of section five, subsection C. Furthermore, fines and penalties shall be levied against-"

"Please stop," Medd said, holding up a hand. Mercifully, Gelba honored his request. "As I explained to you before, the Jedi Council can do nothing to grant your demands. I am not here to eliminate the royal family. I am only here to offer my services as a mediator in the negotiations between your group and the Doan nobility."

"They refuse to negotiate with us!" one of the miners shouted.

"Can you blame them?" Medd countered. "You killed the crown prince."

"That was a mistake," Gelba said. "We didn't mean to destroy his airspeeder. We only wanted to force it into an emergency landing. We were trying to capture him alive."

"Your intentions are irrelevant now," Medd told her, keeping his voice calm and even. "By killing the heir to the throne, you brought the wrath of the royal family down on you."

"Are you defending their actions?" Gelba demanded. "They hunt my people like animals! They imprison us without trial! They torture us for information, and execute us if we resist! Now even the Jedi turn a blind eye to our suffering. You're no better than the Galactic Senate!"

Medd understood the miners' frustration. Doan had been a member of the Republic for centuries, but there had been no serious efforts by the Republic Senate or any governing body to address the injustices of their societal structure. Comprising millions of member worlds, each with its own unique traditions and systems of government, the Republic had adopted a policy of noninterference except in the most extreme cases.

Officially, idealists condemned the lack of a democratic government on Doan. But historically the population had always been granted the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, freedom from slavery, and even legal recourse in cases where a noble abused the privileges of rank. While the rich on Doan undoubtedly exploited the poor, there were many other worlds where the situation was much, much worse.

However, the reluctance of the Senate to become involved had not stopped the efforts of those who sought to change the status quo. Over the last decade, a movement demanding political and social equality had sprung up among the lower castes. Naturally, there was resistance from the nobility, and recently the tension had escalated into violence, culminating in the assassination of the Doan crown prince nearly three standard months earlier.

In response, the king had declared a state of martial law. Since then, there had been a steady stream of troubling reports supporting Gelba's accusations. Yet galactic sympathy for the rebels was slow to build. Many in the Senate saw them as terrorists, and as much as Medd sympathized with their plight, he was unable to act without Senate authority.

The Jedi were legally bound by galactic law to remain neutral in all civil wars and internal power struggles, unless the violence threatened to spread to other Republic worlds. All the experts agreed there was little chance of that happening.

"What is being done to your people is wrong," Medd agreed, choosing his words carefully. "I will do what I can to convince the king to stop his persecution of your people. But I cannot promise anything."

"Then why are you here?" Gelba demanded.

Medd hesitated. In the end, he decided that straightforward truth was the only recourse. "A few weeks ago one of your teams dug up a small tomb."

"Doan is covered with old tombs," Gelba replied. "Centuries ago we used to bury our dead . . . back before the nobility decided they would dig up the whole planet."

"There was a small cache of artifacts inside the tomb," Medd continued. "An amulet. A ring. Some old parchment scrolls."

"Anything we dig up belongs to us!" one of the miners shouted angrily.

"It's one of our oldest laws," Gelba confirmed. "Even the royal family knows better than to try and violate it."

"My Master believes those artifacts may be touched by the dark side," Medd said. "I must bring them back to our Temple on Coruscant for safekeeping."

Gelba glared at him with narrowed eyes, but didn't speak.

"We will pay you, of course," Medd added.

"You Jedi portray yourselves as guardians," Gelba said. "Champions of the weak and downtrodden. But you care more about a handful of gold trinkets than you do about the lives of men and women who are suffering."

"I will try to help you," Medd promised. "I will speak to the king on your behalf. But first I must have those-"

He stopped abruptly, the echo of his words still hanging in the cavern. Something's wrong. There was a sudden sickness in the pit of his stomach, a sense of impending danger.

"What?" Gelba demanded. "What is it?"

A disturbance in the Force, Medd thought, his hand dropping to the lightsaber on his belt. "Somebody's coming."

"Impossible. The sentries at the tunnel outside would have-ungh!"

Gelba's words were cut off by the unmistakable sound of a blaster's retort. She staggered back and fell to the ground, a smoking hole in her chest. With cries of alarm the other miners scattered, scrambling for cover behind the rock formations that filled the cavern. Two of them didn't make it, felled by deadly accurate shots that took them right between the shoulder blades.

Medd held his ground, igniting his lightsaber and peering into the shadows that lined the walls of the cave. Unable to pierce the darkness with his eyes, he opened himself to the Force-and staggered back as if he had been punched in the stomach.

Normally, the Force washed over him like a warm bath of white light, strengthening him, centering him. This time, however, it struck him like a frozen fist in the gut.

Another blaster bolt whistled by his ear. Dropping to his knees, Medd crawled to cover behind the nearest rock formation, bewildered and confused. As a Jedi, he had trained his entire life to transform himself into a servant of the Force. He had learned to let the light side flow through him, empowering him, enhancing his physical senses, guiding his thoughts and actions. Now the very source of his power had seemingly betrayed him.

He could hear blaster bolts ricocheting throughout the chamber as the miners returned fire against their unseen opponent, but he shut out the sounds of battle. He didn't understand what had happened to him; he only knew he had to find some way to fight it.

Panting, the Jedi silently recited the first lines of the Jedi Code, struggling to regain his composure. There is no emotion; there is peace. The mantra of his Order allowed him to bring his breathing under control. A few seconds later he felt composed enough to reach out carefully to try to touch the Force once more.

Instead of peace and serenity, he felt only anger and hatred. Instinctively, his mind recoiled, and Medd realized what had happened. Somehow the power he was drawing on had been tainted by the dark side, corrupted and poisoned.

He still couldn't explain it, but now he at least knew how to try to resist the effects. Blocking out his fear, the Jedi allowed the Force to flow through him once more in the faintest, guarded trickle. As he did so, he focused his mind on cleansing it of the impurities that had overwhelmed his senses. Slowly, he felt the power of the light side washing over him . . . though it was far less than what he was used to.

Stepping out from behind the rocks, he called out in a loud voice, "Show yourself!"

A blaster bolt ripped from the darkness toward him. At the last second he deflected it with his lightsaber, sending it off harmlessly into the corner-a technique he had mastered years ago while still a Padawan.

Too close, he thought to himself. You're slow, hesitant. Trust in the Force.

The power of the Force enveloped him, but something about it still felt wrong. Its strength flickered and ebbed, like a static-filled transmission. Something-or someone-was disrupting his ability to focus. A dark veil had fallen across his consciousness, interfering with his ability to draw upon the Force. For a Jedi there was nothing more terrifying, but Medd had no intention of retreating.

"Leave the miners alone," he called out, his voice betraying none of the uncertainty he felt. "Show yourself and face me!"

From the far corner of the room a young Iktotchi woman stepped forth, holding a blaster pistol in each hand. She was clad in a simple black cloak, but she had thrown her hood back to reveal the downward-curving horns that protruded from the sides of her head and tapered to a sharp point just above her shoulders. Her reddish skin was accentuated by black tattoos on her chin-four sharp, thin lines extending like fangs from her lower lip.

"The miners are dead," she told him. There was something cruel in her voice, as if she was taunting him with the knowledge.

Gingerly using the Force to extend his awareness, Medd realized it was true. As if peering through an obscuring haze, he could just manage to see the bodies of the miners strewn about the chamber, each branded by a lethal shot to the head or chest. In the few seconds it had taken him to collect himself, she had slain them all.

"You're an assassin," he surmised. "Sent by the royal family to kill the rebel leaders."

Users Review

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