



Rebel Stand: Star Wars Legends (The New Jedi Order): Enemy Lines II (Star Wars: The New Jedi Order Book 12)

By Aaron Allston

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On Coruscant, Luke and Mara Jade Skywalker have made a shocking discovery that is preventing the Yuuzhan Vong from exerting complete control. But when the enemy tracks them down, Luke and Mara are thrust into a fierce battle for their lives. Suddenly, the chances of escaping appear nearly impossible. And in space, another battle rages, one that holds ominous consequences for the New Republic—and for the Jedi themselves. . . .

Features a bonus section following the novel that includes a primer on the *Star Wars* expanded universe, and over half a dozen excerpts from some of the most popular *Star Wars* books of the last thirty years!

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Editorial Review

From the Inside Flap

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About the Author

Aaron Allston was the *New York Times* bestselling author of thirteen *Star Wars* novels as well as the Doc Sidhe novels, which combine 1930s-style hero-pulp fiction with Celtic myth. In addition to being a writer, he was a game designer, and in 2006 he was inducted into the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts and Design Hall of Fame. Allston died in 2014.

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One Month Ago, Pyria System: Borleias Occupation, Day 1

"A god cannot die," Charat Kraal said. "Therefore it can have no fear of death. So who is braver, a god or a mortal?"

Charat Kraal was a pilot of the Yuuzhan Vong—humanoid, a little over two meters in height. His skin, where it was not covered by geometric tattoos, was pale, marked everywhere by the white, slightly reflective lines of old scars. Some years-ago mishap had eaten away the center of his face, eliminating even the diminutive nose common to the Yuuzhan Vong, leaving behind brown-crust ed cartilage and horizontal holes into his sinus passages. His forehead angled back less dramatically than many of the Yuuzhan Vong and looked a trifle more like the forehead of a human, for which two warriors had taunted him, for which he had killed them. He disguised the trait as much as he could by yanking out the last of the hair on his head and adding skulltop tattoos that drew the eye up and back, away from the offending forehead. One day he would earn an implant that would further mask his deformity and end his problem.

He wore an oogolith cloaker, the transparent environment suit of Yuuzhan Vong pilots, over a simple warrior's loincloth. Both garments were living creatures, engineered and bred to perform only the tasks demanded of them, to aid the Yuuzhan Vong in their pursuit of glory.

He sat in the cockpit of his coralskipper, the irregular rocklike space fighter of his kind, but he did not wear his cognition hood at the moment; the masklike creature that kept him in mental contact with his craft, that allowed him to sense with its senses and pilot it with the agility of thought rather than muscle and reaction, was set to the side while his coralskipper cruised on routine patrol.

He and his mission partner, Penzak Kraal, were in distant orbit above the world Borleias. The planet had

been recently seized from the infidels native to this galaxy so that it could be used as a staging area for the Yuuzhan Vong assault on the galactic throneworld of Coruscant. Borleias was an agreeably green world, not overgrown with the dead, crusty dwellings of the infidels, not strewn with their unnatural implements of technology; only a military base, now smashed, had affronted the Yuuzhan Vong with evidence of infidel occupation.

The voice of Penzak Kraal emerged from the small, head-shaped villip mounted on the cockpit wall just beneath the canopy. Though most coralskippers were not equipped with villips, relying instead on the telepathic signals of yammosk war coordinators for all their communications, long-distance patrol craft did call for a means for direct communications. "Don't be an idiot. If a god is the god of bravery, then by definition he must be braver than any Yuuzhan Vong, than anything living."

"I wonder. Let us say then that you could become immortal as the gods, and never die, but remain one of the Yuuzhan Vong. You would never face death. Could you then be as brave as the Yuuzhan Vong? You could kill forever but never truly risk death, defy death, choose your time and place of death. Which is better, to be brave for a lifetime or to kill forever?"

"Who cares? The choice is not ours. But if I were to choose, I think I would choose immortality. Live long enough, and you might learn how to be brave as a Yuuzhan Vong again. Kill long enough, and you could perhaps learn to kill a star."

Charat Kraal sobered. "I have heard . . ."

"What?"

"That the infidels did that. Learned to kill a star."

He heard Penzak Kraal hiss in irritation; in the villip he saw his partner's lopsided features go even more off center as his mouth pulled down in an expression of contempt. "So what if they did? They killed it the wrong way, with their wrong minds and their wrong devices. And, like idiots, they must have lost the secret. Or they'd be destroying the worldships one by one."

"I have also heard . . ." Charat Kraal lowered his voice, a foolish instinct, since no one but Penzak Kraal could be listening to him. "That gods may smile upon them, too. On the infidels."

"Ridiculous."

"Can you know the minds of the gods?"

"I can no more know the minds of the gods than summon one of the enemy battleships to destroy for my personal glory."

In the distance, away from Borleias, many kilometers from them, an enemy battleship winked into existence, its bow pointed toward them. The ship was already up to speed; it grew rapidly as it neared them, as it approached Borleias.

"Penzak, you fool."

"My words did not summon it, you idiot." The villip's face blurred and adjusted, reflecting a change to Pen-

zak's features; Penzak had pulled on his cognition hood. Charat did likewise. His surroundings, the cockpit interior, seemed to become transparent, giving him a view in all directions through the senses of the coralskipper, showing him in breathtaking detail the onrushing enemy ship.

No, now it was ships. More and more of the loathsome things of metal were dropping out of hyperspace, all aimed at Borleias. At Charat and Penzak.

A moment later, Charat could feel a buzz through the cognition hood, a telltale sign that Penzak was sending a warning to the Domain Kraal commander on Borleias.

The foremost New Republic ship, a sharply angled triangle in white, passed over the two coralskippers, blotting out the sun, casting them into shadow. Nowhere near so large as a Yuuzhan Vong worldship, it was still of impressive size, and so near that Charat felt he could reach out and drag his finger along its hull as it passed.

Penzak Kraal sent his coralskipper into a dive and turned to match the larger craft's course. Charat paced him. Above, he saw thruster goutts from the ship's belly herald the launching of the hated infidel starfighters.

"How do we hurt them worst?" Charat asked.

"Follow me in," Penzak said. "While they're launching. Don't engage the fighters; bait them so they follow us. The ship won't fire on us with the fighters in close proximity. We'll enter their launching bays and destroy the facilities there, then gut the ship from within." He looped around, rising and angling in toward the ship's belly. Charat followed.

Mon Mothma, one of the newest cruisers in the New Republic's fleet, a Star Destroyer refitted with gravity-well generators capable of interfering with the short jumps made by Yuuzhan Vong craft, cruised straight toward Borleias from the point where it had dropped out of hyperspace. This hadn't been a timed drop—they'd plotted a course straight for the planet Borleias, and the planet's gravity well had dragged them into realspace when they'd come close enough. And now before them was the blue-green world they had come to recapture.

"No sign of a Yuuzhan Vong worldship in orbit," reported the sensor officer, a Mon Calamari male with deep blue skin. "The two coralskippers are turning to engage."

General Wedge Antilles, a lean man with a careworn face and military posture, commander of the fleet group for which Mon Mothma was the flagship, nodded. "Gunnery, stay on them, vape them if they come against us. Fighter control, continue launching starfighter squadrons."

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, sir."

Data screens lit up with colored blips as New Republic starfighters—X-wings, A-9s, B-wings, E-wings, and more—streamed out of the docking bays and turned toward the planet. Wedge, standing at the captain's station toward the rear of the spacious bridge, ignored the screens. He concentrated instead on the live view of Borleias, which filled the main viewport at the bow end of the bridge.

I hope the Vong here have come to love this world, he told himself. Because I'm going to take it from them.

They're going to learn what it is to lose the things they love.

Luke Skywalker hit his thrusters. His X-wing roared out of the main docking bay, losing altitude relative to the Mon Mothma. Behind him, eleven pilots of Twin Suns Squadron, the temporary X-wing squad that was his command, formed up on him. "Twin Suns away," he said.

"Twin Suns, copy." That would be the controller on Mon Mothma's bridge. "Be advised, two coralskippers are maneuvering into your flight path."

Luke glanced at his sensor board. Two red blips were indeed turning from below to head toward them. "Squadron, follow me out, let's give these two the gauntlet treatment."

He heard a chorus of acknowledgments. There was tension in some of the voices, but not alarm. All his pilots were veterans, survivors of the Sabers, the Shocks, and other squadrons that had been reduced to shield trios, wing pairs, and solo pilots during the Yuuzhan Vong attack on Coruscant mere days earlier. Two of them, forming with him a shield trio, were his wife, Mara Jade Skywalker, and the Corellian-Security-officer-turned-pilot-turned-Jedi named Corran Horn. All his pilots were disciplined and competent. Many wanted revenge.

Luke understood how they felt. The Vong, aided by their human agent Viki Shesh, had almost managed to kidnap his and Mara's infant son, Ben, just days ago. They had killed his nephew Anakin, and his nephew Jacen was missing. The losses, especially that of his apprentice Anakin, created an ache within him that he could not soothe.

In his youth, Luke would have been anxious for payback, but today he set that portion of himself aside. That was dark side thinking, immature thinking. It had been a long time since he had been a smooth-faced innocent; the scars of combat and lines of age had accumulated on his face, matching the weight of experience and calm that had accumulated on his spirit.

He extended his perceptions and sought Mara with them. He found her and almost flinched away from the contact; she was now an icy presence, concentrated totally on their mission.

He shrugged. Iciness was better than one alternative. Mara, despite her cool and controlled manner, was as anguished as he by the near loss of Ben and the loss of their nephews, and it would be no surprise to find her lit like a lightsaber with a desire for revenge. The fact that she wasn't meant that she was in control.

"S-foils to attack position," Luke said, and suited action to words by flipping the switch that split the X-wings' flight surfaces into their familiar X-shaped attack profile. "First and third trios, take the leader, the rest on the wingmate. Fire at will." He linked his lasers to quad fire, so that all four would fire with a single press of the trigger, and opened up on the lead coralskipper. Four red streams of destructive laser energy lanced out against the coralskipper—

No, it was eight streams. Luke's burst, aimed at the starboard side of the skip, never reached its target; a blackness appeared before it, distorting space around it like a gigantic magnifying lens, drawing the laserfire into it. Those four red lances of energy simply bent and disappeared. But Mara's burst, aimed at the port side, hit the coralskipper an instant after Luke's vanished. He grinned; she must have been using her own Force abilities to monitor him, as well. She couldn't have timed it so expertly otherwise. Her lasers raked across the enemy starfighter's hull until the distortion flicked over to interpose itself, then Luke fired again, chipping away at the coralskipper's stern. His blasts were joined by Corran's. The coral-like material of the

skip's hull superheated and the lasers tore red-hot gouges along the surface.

Users Review

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