

The Last Command Study Guide

The Last Command by Timothy Zahn

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Plot Summary

The Last Command pits the New Republic against the Grand Admiral Thrawn in a battle for survival. Thrawn's clone production, sped up so much that insanity is guaranteed, must be ended. As Thrawn and the insane Master Jedi Joruus C'baoth vie for control of the Empire, a small band of Rebels flies to the hidden facility and destroys it. Both C'baoth and Thrawn die, so the headless Empire ceases to be a threat.

Thrawn and Joruus C'baoth vie for control of the Empire but temporarily cooperate to convince Rebels that a powerful new weapon exists. C'baoth wants only to make Leia Organa Solo and her twins his apprentices. While seeking evidence of clone shipments, Jedi Luke Skywalker runs into a smuggler, Talon Karrde, and agrees to pay him for information. Karrde's partner, Mara Jade, who has budding Force powers and is convalescing on Coruscant, tells Leia that the late Emperor's voice is commanding her to "kill Luke Skywalker." Thrawn placates C'baoth by sending a commando team to kidnap the Solos, but only succeeds in implicating Mara as an accomplice. She is jailed.

Meanwhile, Karrde seeks converted smugglers and rallies them to New Republic's side only when their meeting is raided by Imperials. Thrawn is furious, fears the consequences, and sets up Karrde for blame. Two smugglers actively avenge their friend's death by sabotaging the Imperial Bilbringi Shipyard. Karrde witnesses this and sees mysterious asteroids, which soon are "cloaked" and released as hazards around Coruscant during Thrawn's "hit-and-fade" attack. Having revealed to Leia the location of the cloning facility, Mara is broken out of jail and spirited off to Wayland just before Coruscant is closed down. Luke, Han Solo, Lando Calrissian, Chewbacca, and the droids accompany Mara on a search-and-destroy mission.

Karrde clears himself at the next meeting and learns that the New Republic thinks it can clear the skies only with a CGT array that must be stolen from the Empire. He organizes to steal one first and sell it to them. The Empire and New Republic are set up for a climactic battle at Bilbringi. Meanwhile, on Wayland, the band makes its way through threatening terrain to Mt. Tantiss and enters. Leia, having realized that C'baoth has also gone there and that the Force is disabled, gets Karrde to fly her there to warn Luke. Luke and Mara go to the throne room to find the self-destruct switch, but encounter C'baoth. Restoring the Force and disabling Mara, C'baoth watches Luke battle his clone, Luuke, and grows furious when Mara kills the latter, fulfilling her last order and setting her free. Despite C'baoth's violent efforts, Mara also fulfills his prophecy by kneeling before him—and thrusting upward with her lightsaber. Karrde's ship is standing by to fly them away before the cataclysmic explosion of the mountain. Back on Coruscant, Mara agrees to mediate between the government and smugglers, and Luke gives her his original lightsaber, which helps her leave the past behind and look to the future.



Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary

The Imperial Star Destroyer Chimaera leads an armada to crush the Rebellion. Jedi Master C'baoth, declaring himself heir to the Empire, is at odds with Grand Admiral Thrawn, but controls the minds of pilots aboard cloaked cruisers above Ukio to make it appear the Empire has a new weapon. The planet capitulates and is occupied. C'baoth's prime goal is to capture Leia Organa Solo. Leia is on her last diplomatic mission before giving birth to twins when the Millennium Falcon runs into TIE fighters above Filve. As they escape into hyperspace, Leia worries about the babies, her brother, Luke Skywalker, and massive numbers of clones.

In Calius, Luke detects the aura of clones, whose presence he is backtracking from this transfer spot to the cloning tanks that must be destroyed. He confronts a pursuer, Talon Karrde, who is neutral in the war but surprised that Thrawn is turning out clones far too fast for safety. Foreseeing a massive offensive, Luke offers a credit line for information. Neither wanted man realizes that their meeting has been watched by Gov. Staffa, who reports to Thrawn and lets Luke escape.

Awakening in a recovery room, Mara Jade slips out and meets the "slicer" Ghent. She realizes that Luke has saved her, the very man whom a voice in her heads orders her to kill. Leia's personal aide, Winter, escorts Mara and Ghent to their suite, but Mara wants only to leave Coruscant. Meanwhile, aboard Chimaera, Thrawn denies C'baoth's demand for a frontal assault on Coruscant but orders commandos to grab Leia and neutralize Mara, and heads the Chimaera to Poderis to intercept Luke.

Chapters 1-3 Analysis

The opening three chapters introduce the major characters and point to the overall conflicts to be resolved in the novel. Many characters are holdovers from the three original Star Wars movies, and author Timothy Zahn clearly assumes that readers are ardent, knowledgeable fans. He alludes to events in the movies constantly as a shortcut to establishing character. The opening also reintroduces several key characters from the first two "Thrawn" novels, with little attempt at making novice readers comfortable with them.

Chapter 1 consists of three scenes. Scene 1 shows Grand Admiral Thrawn and his aide, Captain Pellaeon, aboard Chimaera dealing with their nemesis, Jedi Master Joruu C'baoth. Thrawn is launching what he intends to be the final assault on Rebel forces, and has C'baoth use his remote mind control to pull off a masterful ruse that brings the surrender of a planet with its defenses and shield intact - a rare occurrence.

Scene 2 jumps to the Millennium Falcon, which is evading an Imperial attack force above the planet Filve. It establishes that Han Solo and Princess Leia are married and



she remains a diplomat despite drawing near to delivering twins. The Wookiee, Chewbacca, and droids, Artoo and ThreeCpio, fill out Falcon's crew. Leia is getting strange feelings through the Force, which will continue through most of the novel, heightening the tension.

About ISD Chimaera in Scene 3—Thrawn and C'baoth hate one another and are working at cross purposes. C'baoth is growing progressively mad, as do most clones who receive insufficient maturation time. C'baoth is obsessed with making Leia and her twins his apprentices. Thrawn is angry that C'baoth has diverted the force attacking Filve to pursue the Falcon. Luke Skywalker's encounter with C'baoth at Jomark and his brief alliance with Mara Jade are mentioned too briefly for anyone who has not read the earlier novels to appreciate. This new major character (Jade) is finally introduced in Chapter 3.

Luke's mission is the sole content of Chapter 2. Luke finds himself in Calius trying to confirm the path for transshipping clones from their point of creation to their installation on Thrawn's ships. Luke is buffeted by noise and voices from all directions, indicating that his mastery of the Force is still incomplete. This theme is often repeated. Note that the "aura" he picks up from in Calius clones differs from that detected at Jomark. Mara's name comes up again when Luke meets Talon Karrde, to whom he is still grateful for help during the battle for the Katana fleet. Beyond the fact that Mara is recovering in a New Republic hospital, nothing is said. The men's discussion of cloning techniques establishes the urgency of Luke's mission and rationale for the Empire's invasion of Ukio. Massive numbers of clones are emerging to man Thrawn's expanded fleet. Thrawn needs to feed them, and the New Republic needs to end the supply. Seeing a growing menace, Karrde agrees to spy for Luke but not go on the New Republic payroll. This later causes Luke and Leia problems with the Council. Chapter 2 rapidly reviews in passing the rise, fall, and restoration of Admiral Ackbar and his animosity towards smugglers. More detail is forthcoming in later chapters.

Chapter 3 finally introduces Mara, explains in the briefest, least dramatic possible terms how she comes to be hospitalized, and how she, Karrde, and Luke are tenuously interlinked. Mara's background as a former Palace intimate emerges and motivates her sour attitude towards the New Republic. Fear of massive, incomplete cloning is the one thing that seems to unite all non-Imperials. Mara spends most of the book working through the Emperor's psychological programming to "kill Luke Skywalker."

Chapter 3 also introduces another crucial, albeit minor character: Winter, Leia's aide and lifelong friend, whose photographic memory proves crucial when the New Republic has to ferret out a spy. The "slicer" Ghent performs useful tasks as well but seems mostly an opportunity for poking fun at "nerds." The final scene in Chapter 3 shows trouble brewing aboard Chimaera. C'baoth insists that he now embodies the Empire and intends to gather a new cadre of Dark Jedis. Thrawn is determined at most to share power with C'baoth and does the militarily correct thing in dispatching commandos to seize Leia and "neutralize" Mara, whom Thrawn fears may know the location of his cloning tanks. As will be seen directly, this plot quickly helps Mara resolve her basic issues.



Chapters 4-7

Chapters 4-7 Summary

Poderis is an ideal transfer point for clone traffic and a trap for Luke, who senses an Imperial Intelligence tail by the ysalamiri harness that blocks the Force. Luke almost traps himself by leaping atop a smooth-faced, angled wind shield-barrier but uses his lightsaber to cut a groove in the surface down which he slides and out of sight, he cuts a hatch. Aboard Chimaera, Thrawn is not surprised to hear that Luke has evaded capture and prepares to capture Luke in space. Luke knows that he has been allowed to escape and watches for another trap. He realizes that "Delta Source" has pinpointed his location. As Luke's freighter is captured by tractor beam, he slips aboard his X-wing fighter in the nose and escapes in the debris cloud that erupts as the freighter self-destructs. He flies to Honoghr to replace damaged fuel cells.

On Coruscant, Mon Mothma chairs a Council meeting. Admiral Ackbar believes the recent Imperial attacks are a trick, but rejects Leia's suggestion to buy information from Karrde. He demands to know General Bel Iblis' whereabouts and wants the tactical genius returned from inspecting defenses in the outer sectors. Leia realizes that her stomach pains come not from the tense meeting, but from labor. Her Jedi training helps hold off pain and assures the twins that "Mother's here." Their tiny minds flutter with fear. Jaina and Jacen are born and all seems right in the universe as Leia holds them. Far away, Bel Iblis is surprised by a sudden, precision attack from hyperspace. Only his fabled wisdom prevents a total rout.

The Wild Karrde comes out of hyperspace near the Chazwa central transshipment center to steal information on cloning. Suddenly, an unregistered freighter pulls up, piloted by Karrde's old friend Gillespee. Gillespee has fled the invasion of Ukio and recorded the attack, which Karrde recommends selling to the New Republic. After fighting off Imperial frigates Karrde and Gillespee agree to rendezvous in eight days on Trogan with other "colleagues" invited. Meanwhile, Thrawn addresses 14 men preparing to penetrate the Imperial Palace, lead by Maj. Himron. Thrawn then turns to the pending invasion of Misst, aimed either at drawing Coruscant forces into an ambush or providing a forward base for a final assault. He has also arranged to build up a small amount of strategic supplies at the Bilbringi by raiding Lando Calrissian's mining complex on Nkllon.

Though forewarned by Leia, Luke is shocked to see Honoghr's wrecked ecology. Vader and Thrawn have deceived the Noghri into serving as Imperial Death Commandos throughout the galaxy. As Vader's son and Leia's brother, Luke is admitted to a deep gorge brilliant with foliage, Leia's legacy. Two Noghri receive Luke and send for parts and technicians. While waiting, Luke "sees" through the Force Leia and Han under siege, but takes comfort in the fact that Lando, also in the dream is on Nkllon. Meanwhile, on Nkllon, Lando surveys how the Empire has for a second time wrecked



his operation. Repairs are impossible without help from Coruscant, whence Bel Iblis takes Lando.

Chapters 4-7 Analysis

Chapter 4 shows Luke in the novel's first high-suspense action sequence, escaping on foot from an Imperial trap on Poderis, and then in space. Force-blocking ysalamiri, previously seen on Chimaera's bridge being worn in frames to interrupt the Force, are here seen in use by stormtroopers targeting Luke specifically. This suggests that "Delta Source" (earlier mentioned) continues funneling critical data out of New Republic headquarters so worryingly that abandoning Coruscant is under consideration. Rooting out the leak becomes a major concern later in the novel, and ysalamiri's power later becomes a switch: Force-on, Force-off. The narrator continues none too subtly to remind fans through Luke's memories of parallel events that occur in the Star Wars movies.

Chapter 5 is set on Coruscant, to show tensions in the ruling Council and providing limited background on the issues. Most likely acting on Luke's recommendation, Leia advocates purchasing information from the smuggler Karrde, but Admiral Ackbar is opposed on principle. General Bel Idris' past and present are sketched in greater detail than most other characters before Leia goes abruptly into labor. Husband Han, always flashing his "lopsided smile," is a stereotypical nervous father-to-be. Leia is comforted by communicating with her unborn babies, whose union in the Force she foresees will be intense. The emotional value of the storytelling never reaches such heights again as the power of motherhood is rather mawkishly examined. An abrupt segue then occurs as Leia's perfect universe becomes a nightmare for Bel Iblis and Rogue Squadron, trapped, encircled, and marked for extermination by another of Thrawn's tactical innovations. Only Bel Iblis' legendary skill, it is said, prevents a rout. The battle scenes are fast-paced but the specific tactics are difficult to follow. The chapter seems intended to remind fans that Wedge is a hothead and a hotshot pilot, while the general is steady under fire.

Brief Chapter 6 shows smugglers Karrde and Gillespie meeting in the middle of nowhere at Chazwa and agreeing to a formal meeting of fellow smugglers in several days. Karrde's co-pilot Aves is skeptical about Luke's data on too-rapid clone production, but Karrde sees a way to make money. Gillespie is a survivor of Ukio and has the visual data that will in later chapters help the New Republic figure out the trick used there and on Woostri. Chapter 6 closes with Thrawn dispatching the commandos who are to snatch Leia, her children, and Mara, who knows too much. With the commandos on their way, Thrawn orders a mission to loot Nkllon of strategic minerals. The two missions are cleverly interlaced in the next chapter to prepare for the key drama ahead.

Chapter 7 describes at some length Luke's sojourn on Honoghr, home planet of the Noghri, who are destined to play a major role in the rest of the novel. Forced down on this planet before *The Last Command* opens, Leia survives, thanks to a people who



have a fierce loyalty to the late Darth Vader, Leia and Luke's biological father. What creates this bond is not explained, but Luke takes full advantage of it. Leia helps the Noghris plant crops that resist the toxic kholm grass that at some point Imperials loose on the planet, wreaking ecological chaos. Luke wonders if Leia sees the futility and shrugs off the question. He feels the Noghris' pain and within days comes to appreciate them as friends, but initially shows a strong prejudice against them that seems out of character. This is left uninvestigated.

While detained on Honoghr, Luke reaches out with the Force to Coruscant to check on loved ones. In a sequence reminiscent of his dream fight with Vader on Dagobah, Luke is overwhelmed by a sense of foreboding. This time, he convinces himself there is time to act, since Lando Calrissian is present in the dream but in reality is not presently on Coruscant. The chapter segues nicely to Nkllon to survey the aftermath of the Imperial raid. Lando is burnt out again and accepts transport from Bel Iblis to the capital to beg for timely help. The final component in Luke's dream falls into place, but he does not compulsively rush off. A sense of looming disaster hangs over the novel.



Chapters 8-9

Chapters 8-9 Summary

Leia is nursing the twins when Han enters the suite and tells of Lando's difficulties with Admiral Drayson. Winter is researching the archives, hoping to prove her suspicion about Delta Source, whom she will not name without proof. Leia infers that Winter means Mara and goes to confront Mara. Mara is near panic as she watches in a dream the Emperor battling Vader and Luke for his life. Unable to help the Emperor, Mara snaps awake, angry and lonely. When Leia knocks, Mara is surprised. Mara announces she intends to kill Luke for ending her comfortable life as the "Emperor's Hand." Leia argues that this is not Mara's own idea. Near Endor both have sensed the late Emperor's "emotional bloodstain." Mara is frustrated that she cannot contact Karrde, her partner, and leave the planet.

After midnight, Mara senses trouble and peers out to see Imperial Intelligence disguised as Palace Security. Unable to sound an alarm, Mara follows them but is stopped and disarmed by Bel Iblis and Lando, returning from a failed mission to persuade Drayson to assign them a frigate. Walking the hallway, Bel Iblis is puzzled to see no guards, finds that comlinks are not functioning, and heads to inform Security. En route, they come upon Mara, who tells what she has seen. Lando goes to his room to fetch his blaster while Bel Iblis goes for reinforcements. Meanwhile, Leia is awakened by a mental warning and hears 5-6 men outside the suite door. When they activate an electronic lock-breaker, she lowers the security door. The intruders blast the outer door, which Mara and Lando hear downstairs and engage a rear guard at the only way up. Lando races to the Falcon to effect a window rescue. Bel Iblis' reinforcements save Mara and begin an assault to forestall a hostage situation.

Barricaded in Winter's bedroom, the Solos consider using the lightsaber to escape passage into adjoining suites but are certain Thrawn will anticipate them. Seeing the Falcon's headlights, Leia is about to cut through the window when the walls come crashing down. A voice within her recommends surrender, which Leia announces. It comes again from Mara through the Force. She has sneaked up a secret passageway and through the debris into the suite. When the firing stops, Mara shoots the invaders. The leader, Maj. Himron, barely survives. In the hospital, he claims Mara, an Imperial agent, admitted them through a secret door. Bel Iblis agrees to Mara's "precautionary detention" while the truth is determined. Han is enraged.

Chapters 8-9 Analysis

Chapter 8 opens with overly coy discussions of breastfeeding between the Solos and other matters of parental obligations (i.e., diapering) and suggests that Leia is being pulled back too soon into her official duties. The story then focuses on Mara Jade and the Imperial commando raid. Winter reveals suspicions about Mara's loyalties, which



sends Leia to confront Mara. Mara is in the midst of her recurring dream about the Emperor's demise when Leia knocks. Their discussion of Thrawn helps round out his character (including a hint that he is non-human) and then turns to Mara's past as the Emperor's Hand and her intention to kill Luke. Leia plants in her mind the suggestion that the murder is not her idea but the Emperor's left inside her as his last bit of hatred. Both women have felt the Emperor's postmortem presence near Endor.

After Leia departs, Mara hears footsteps and begins tailing Maj. Himron's commandos. At the turn of the corridor, she is overtaken dramatically from the rear. Chapter 9 backtracks to show why Bel Iblis and Lando are in the corridor, independently worried about the lack of customary security guards. They had been lobbying the wary Adm. Drayson about a warship capable to rescue Lando's investment on Nkllon. Bel Iblis provides background information about his and Drayson's friction over Mon Mothma's leadership and the need for Ackbar to return quickly to take charge of matters.

Forming an effective quick response force, Bel Iblis, Lando, and Mara split up to perform separate tasks needed to thwart the invaders. All depend on the legendary Solo luck holding because time is against them. Mara gets into a firefight that probably would have gone against her had Bel Iblis not arrived with reinforcements. As he commits them to an assault that will likely cost lives, Mara contemplates the seriousness of such command decisions, sends a mental warning to Leia by the Force, and sneaks up a hidden passageway to re-enter the battle. En route, she contemplates that she is the only factor Thrawn cannot anticipate. Upstairs, the Solos realize that Thrawn will have every exit closed except a lightsaber-cut passage down the outside of the building like the one Luke has recently performed (unbeknownst to them) on Poderis. A second mental message gets Leia to surrender—providing an opening for Mara to gun down the would-be kidnapers. The cleverness of Thrawn's plot is shown when with the word of the surviving Himron, Mara is arrested.



Chapters 10-13

Chapters 10-13 Summary

The biggest names in smuggling gather at Whistler's Whirlpool tapcafe on Trogan. Lookouts report no activity at the Imperial garrison, which is odd but not alarming. Karrde fails to convince colleagues to forgo Imperial business or to court its wrath. The unwanted Ferrier enters late and tells convincingly of how Thrawn has dealt ill with him. No one is happy about the new clones but they see this as the New Republic's problem. Whichever side pays best deserves the smugglers' business. As the meeting closes, the back wall blows in and Imperial forces advance. A black shadow—Ferrier's wraith, Defel, launches a surprising attack on the Imperials, allowing the smugglers to rally, as they have prepared. The *mêlée* ends as quickly as it begins. The survivors enlist in Karrde's program, with Ellor and Mazzic planning actively to avenge Lishma the Gotal's death and Brasck standing aloof but agreeing not to inform. No ambush awaits as the smugglers depart; they agree to reconvene in five days at Chazwa and then race into hyperspace.

Ferrier is brought before Thrawn, who threatens execution for bribing Lt. Reynol Kosk to mount a raid against explicit orders. It has cost men and material and solidified the smugglers against the Empire. Thrawn grants Ferrier one last chance: to attend the next meeting and deliver to Karrde the gift of a stolen assault shuttle and plant evidence to incriminate Karrde over the Whistler's Whirlpool debacle.

In the Palace's Grand Corridor lined with *ch'hala* trees, whose bark changes colors in response to pressure, Han confronts Col. Bremen of Security and hears that Mara will remain under arrest and thoroughly investigated until Mon Mothma rules otherwise. Han turns to see Luke, briefs him about Mara, and is surprised to learn about her Imperial background. Luke feels a disturbance in the Force from the cell where Leia is meeting Mara. Mara insists she will kill Luke but admits to saving Leia because she cannot imagine the babies falling into Thrawn—or C'baoth's—hands as she had fallen into the Emperor's as a child. When Leia mentions "fighting clones" and fills Mara in on what has been learned while Mara has been out of touch, Mara recalls visiting the Emperor's private storehouse at Wayland and seen at least 20,000 cylinders. Fear of a new Clone War moves Mara to serve as guide to Wayland.

Later, in Leia's secure office, an ad hoc war council debates how Mara could have failed to hear about the cloning, the coincidences surrounding her, and the risk of attacking Wayland with so limited a number of available and trustworthy fighters. Unable to risk going through channels with Mon Mothma for fear of leaks, they resolve to break Mara out of confinement. Luke, Han, Lando, and the droids will accompany Mara, joined by Chewie once Leia releases him from his life-debt by accepting protection from loyal Noghri.



Disguised as an independent freighter carrying power converters, the Wild Karrde arrive at the Imperial Shipyards of Bilbringi. Awaiting inspection, they are puzzled to see 22 midsized asteroids being manipulated by suited workers and wonder if it is related to Thrawn's mystery weapon. They are looking at a half-finished Star Destroyer when it explodes in a flash. Mazzic's people race away with TIE fighters in pursuit. Karrde vacillates on how to react, but seeing Ellor's Corellian gunships appear and claim the advantage, decides merely to eavesdrop on the Imperials cleaning up the mess. Thrawn surely will not let this go without punishment, so the smugglers must join the Alliance. More than ever, Karrde needs Mara back.

Reviewing the Bilbringi damage report, Thrawn gives General Drost 30 hours to implement a new security system. Suspecting Mazzic of the attack, Thrawn is angry that the smugglers have been stirred up. As Thrawn continues his analysis to Pellaeon, C'baoth strides in, bellowing about the commandos' failure and demanding an immediate assault on Coruscant. Thrawn has already decided to do so once he has loaded the asteroids, meaning to shake Rebel morale before launching a final attack. C'baoth forbids destroying Coruscant until he has his Jedis in hand and petulantly takes control of the minds of the entire portside crew. Thrawn reminds him of the difficulty of maintaining such control on 37,000 minds for five days and mounting a siege with no military expertise or data. C'baoth releases the men and begins a tantrum about controlling the Force. Thrawn insists that he must re-create the Empire before C'baoth can rule. C'baoth insists that he alone is indispensable. Thrawn has his eyes set on moving history.

Ten Noghri slip into Coruscant disguised as Jawas and are spirited to the Solos' suite. On behalf of the whole honor guard, Cakhmaim clan Eikh'mir makes obeisance and pledges their lives. Leia looks and sounds regal in accepting. Han resents being called "Consort of the Lady Vader" and is uncomfortable about the plan, but Luke convinces him it is the only way. The Noghri set up a defense perimeter. Departure must be immediate. Mara awakens from her nightmare, whose outcome is unchanged, to hear an intruder enter her cell. She balks at taking Luke and the others to Wayward or getting involved in the war. Relenting, Mara is amused that this "pillar of law and justice" is organizing a prison break. Lando flies them to where the Falcon is hidden. Han sets course for Obroa-skai, the last stop before Wayland, and Mara begins plotting the final leg. Han counters Mara's cynicism about the tiny strike force by recounting victories against great odds.

The catastrophic losses at Endor hang over preparations for the "hit-and-fade" attack on Coruscant, should C'baoth again interfere. The Bellicose task force pulls up beside Chimaera. Offering no explanation, C'baoth demands a ship under his own command to take instantly to Wayland. Thrawn gives him Draklor, stipulating that it will also carry General Covell to his new command and supplemental troops, as already planned. Thrawn doubts there is trouble on Wayland, since Delta Source has shown no indications, but considers the Jedi Master may be anticipating something. His being there may even be a solution to a problem, Thrawn tells Pellaeon enigmatically. Thrawn turns his attention to reminding the Rebellion "what war is all about."



Chapters 10-13 Analysis

Chapter 10 depicts the smugglers' summit meeting on Trogan. The setting in Whistler's Whirlpool is picturesquely told, down to the crashing waves in the "Drinking Cup," which depends on the tides for its height and noise-level. An almost overwhelming host of characters is introduced, including colorful non-humans, to argue the merits of dropping neutrality between the Empire and New Republic in light of the threat of Thrawn's accelerated cloning operation. In the end, most of the smugglers care only about their individual economic interests. Thrawn's reputation is rather more bloodthirsty than has been demonstrated, and he is clearly held in awe.

Neutrality ends when a squad of Imperials blasts into the tapcafe. The meeting's organizers have anticipated a raid and suspended two snipers in the Drinking Cup and timed the meeting for low tide. The firefight begins when Ferrier's invisible wraith, Defel, distracts the Imperials. Defel is destined to play a key role in Thrawn's plot to break up the ad hoc alliance that this raid brings about. Ferrier is summoned before Thrawn to explain why he organized the raid, threatened, and ordered to be a good, obedient spy going forward. Thrawn knows that the united and motivated smugglers will be troublesome. Note how he differentiates himself from Darth Vader in not wasting men and matériel lightly. Thrawn increasingly appears restrained and perceptive.

Chapter 11 returns the action to the Palace at Coruscant and a confrontation between Han Solo and the commander of New Republic Intelligence. The setting in the Grand Corridor lined with ch'hala trees, whose bark changes colors in response to pressure, is so heavily emphasized that it must play an important role going forward. The failed commando break-in has heightened concerns about security and the hidden spy in particular, and Major Himron has, as Thrawn plans, hung a cloud of suspicion over Mara. Luke, returned from his spying missions, knows about Mara being the Emperor's Hand but has revealed it to no one. It can only worsen the chances of her being exonerated by what is shaping up as an inquisition.

Chapter 11 also shows Leia visiting Mara in her detention cell. Somehow Mara has failed to hear about Thrawn's cloning operation but is sufficiently alarmed at the prospect to lead the New Alliance to Wayland where the cloning operation is headquartered. Her memories allow the enormous scope of the project to be appreciated. An emergency ad hoc "war council" decides who will constitute the mission, which is reminiscent of the raid on the moon of Endor. Luke's surveying the room and reminiscing about each character's portrayal in the original three movies is gratuitous and provides no insights into what begins in Chapter 13.

Chapter 12 shows Karrde watching the Imperial Shipyards of Bilbringi as part of the smugglers' resolve to locate the cloning facility by backtracking delivery routes. He is thus in position to document Imperial technicians doing something mysterious with a group of 22 mid-sized asteroids. Karrde's attention is diverted to the fiery destruction of a half-built Star Destroyer by Mazzic and Ellor, who, after Trogan, insist on more proactive retribution for the death of their friend. Note how Karrde is torn between "honor



among thieves" and self-preservation by allowing the foolhardy raiders to demonstrate Darwin's law of the survival of the fittest. Feeling secure that the Imperials will not seek him at the very heart of their operations, Karrde watches for more intelligence to pass along to Luke.

The scene shifts to the Chimaera, where Thrawn again allows an officer to make amends for an error that under Vader would have meant instant death. The shipyard commander has until the flagship departs to beef up security. This will show during the novel's climax. This matter out of the way, Thrawn calmly confronts and confounds C'baoth, livid over the commandos' failure to kidnap Leia and her children. C'baoth paralyzes half the bridge crew to demonstrate his power, but is easily convinced of how difficult it will be to fly single-handedly to Coruscant, yet alone mount an effective siege. Thrawn and C'baoth bat claims and threats back and forth before the petulant Master Jedi retreats to his quarters. Thrawn sets a course for Coruscant with a load of asteroids for a "hit-and-fade" operation, still shrouded in mystery and said to be the prime subject of shipboard gossip.

Chapter 13 brings ten Noghri to Coruscant to serve as Leia's bodyguard while Han and Chewie are on the mission to Wayland. The information on this short-statured race provided during Luke's stopover on Honoghr is augmented, but the reader who has not read the previous volumes in the trilogy remains frustrated by the disjointed scraps. It is made clear that the Noghri are effective warriors and intensely loyal to Vader and his descendants. Han is exasperated to be relegated to the role of Leia's "consort." The Solos' angst at being separated is effective because it is underplayed.

By contrast, Mara leaving detention is handled drolly. She sees irony in goody-two-shoes Luke engineering a near-traitorous "jailbreak." Animosity remains, but alliance is unavoidable. The dream that haunts Mara is again shown, emphasizing how powerless she feels to protect the doomed Emperor. By contrast with the clumsy reminiscences in Chapter 11, those in Chapter 13 are apt, for they point up how a near-omniscient mind using the dark side of the Force can spell disaster. Thrawn having insisted in Chapter 12 that he, not C'baoth, is essential to the re-building of the Empire, could perish if C'baoth continues abusing his (C'baoth's) powers. The small Rebel force having departed for Wayland, C'baoth, of course, heads there also, making inevitable a confrontation among surviving Jedi. The reasons for why he wants to control them, hitherto left vague, are about to become clear.



Chapters 14-16

Chapters 14-16 Summary

Leia is dreaming about Luke and Mara confronting a crazy hooded figure, whose hands flow with lightning when battle alert alarms wail. She entrusts the twins to Winter and heads to the war room. Leia is certain that Luke would be able to detect a Dark Jedi from space and have the sense to abort the mission. The hallways are in chaos as she descends to the level where military operations are located, with the most important officers in the center. The master tactical display shows a massive attack and interdicator cruisers using gravity cones to prevent traffic to or from Coruscant. Encountering Ghent, Leia finds work for him in the crowded cryptography room as she heads to the center of the room. The competent but uncreative Admiral Drayson occupies the command chair and barks orders. Ackbar is away on inspection. Leia talks to General Rieekan, who sees the current defenses as wasting power. She consults General Bel Iblis' chief advisor, who says he is on the balcony staying out of the way until and unless Mon Mothma invites him to take charge, and Bel Iblis' himself. As Leia accuses Bel Iblis' advisor of acting like a child, Mon Mothma approaches, humbles herself to ask his help.

Meanwhile, aboard Chimaera, Thrawn sees in a tactical Rebel retreat that Bel Iblis has assumed command. He holds off deploying his secret weapon until the field is clear enough for Bel Iblis not to miss what is happening. Seeing Imperial forces back off, probably anticipating Rebel reinforcements from the sector fleet, Leia is rejoicing in Coruscant's survival when monitors see Chimaera's hanger bay open. Surprised at the amount of energy being used, Bel Iblis fears that Thrawn is launching a cloaked ship and Leia recalls Ackbar's comments about the high danger of using double-blind shields. This could indicate a new super weapon. Bel Iblis orders the battle stations to fire along the exit vectors. When the Evanrue impacts with an unknown physical object and spins out of control, Bel Iblis orders ion cannons used to disable the object and capture it intact. Aboard Chimaera, Thrawn has predicted this response from Bel Iblis, fires on the target himself to remove the cloaking, allows Bel Iblis long enough to get a good look, and pulverizes the asteroid with a final salvo. Having fired the tractor beam 287 times - all but 22 being "dry firings," Thrawn ends the offensive. Having to assume there are that many cloaked asteroids menacing the planet, these Rebels are effectively out of the war. Knowing how expensive cloaking is, Bel Iblis doubts that they face finding and destroying 286 targets, but Rieekan points out even one reaching the surface would be catastrophic. The planetary shield must remain up, interrupting traffic.

Bremen reports that Mara has escaped with help and is probably off-planet. Leia braces herself and explains the whole plan, done secretly to avoid leaks. It is vital that spies believe Mara is still detained on Coruscant, lest Wayland be reinforced. Mon Mothma is angry that the Council is not consulted and worries it could be a set-up to kill Luke and Han. Leia admits the possibility but believes it is worth the risk. Mon Mothma says reinforcements will be sent if Wayland's location is identified and after they deal with the



cloaked asteroids. Ghent reappears, bored with the tasks he has been given and hands Leia a data card holding Delta Source's encrypt code, which has eluded Security.

The smugglers next meet in the crumbling fortress of Hijarna. Clyngunn's report shows that clone traffic has dried up in Orus sector—if it had ever been happening there. The smugglers are hard-pressed to cover payrolls and buy fuel; they want out and feel safe since the Empire is ignoring them, and in Par'tah's case has even offered a contract to carry engines to the Ord Trasi shipyards. Karrde offers to hire Gillespee to "snoop" for the New Republic after getting Ghent to tap the accounting system.

That evening, contemplating the foolishness of mixing in galactic politics, Karrde is joined by his pet vornskrs, Drang and Sturm. On Myrkr, they show Force sensitivity when around Luke and Mara. The ysalamiri appear to have evolved the Force-bubble as protection against vornskrs. Meanwhile, aboard Chimaera, Mazzic is brought to Thrawn in chains. Thrawn knows his motive for attacking Bilbringi but reveals that he had forbidden any raid. Kosk and his men had accepted bribes and those responsible will suffer. Offering no hints, Thrawn lets Mazzic go. Ferrier, who has been listening, is ordered to attend the next meeting, have his Defel plant an incriminating data card in the Wild Karrde, and stay above suspicion. His debt to the Empire is deep.

The Falcon arrives above a green-and-blue planet that has no name or facilities of any kind. Mara locates Mt. Tantiss' general location, but there are no electronic transmissions to pinpoint it. She expects they will encounter ground patrols at most. Han and Lando both suspect they are being tailed in space, unless it is a glitch. Mara recalls that Mt. Tantiss has one entrance and has seen the throne room and Spaarti cylinder chamber. She suspects that there are cooling vents opposite the entrance. As Mara and Luke continue avoiding one another as they have throughout the flight, Han worries about them as a team, but Luke is willing to bet his life on her. Luke knows this mission is something that Mara needs.

Han never liked forests before joining the Rebel Alliance and experiences during the war has not changed his mind. Every forest is unique and presents problems. Falcon has difficulty penetrating the dense leaf canopy without leaving a hole for TIE pilots to spot. Sensors show a variety of animals at a distance. They see two-meter long predators as soon as they lower the ramp and begin unloading equipment. The sound of a speeder bike's repulsorlift makes the predators attack. Several predators are killed before one injures Han and tries to enter the Falcon. When the danger passes, Mara explains they are garrals, used by the Empire as watchdogs because the sound of repulsorlifts attracts them. They check the carcasses for radio tags but find nothing. The assault must now take place on foot, an 8-9 day walk. Mara believes that the two native species, Psadans and Myneyrshi, neither fond of humans, and predators will lengthen the hike to 12-13 days. Flying closer will surely be detected and bring in Imperial reinforcements. Transmitting their coordinates to Coruscant is also too risky.

The first hour is slowed by thick underbrush and predators before they find a dry river bed. Mara makes clear that she works for Karrde, who is neutral in the war, has come because she does not want to see clones swarming the galaxy again, and allows the



others to come because she cannot shut down the place alone. Making camp, Luke senses a change in Mara before she asks what only he knows: how the Emperor died. Luke makes clear she has seen the event wrongly: he and Vader do not team up on the Emperor. Rather, the Emperor sets them against each other and paralyzes Luke with lightning for refusing to turn to the Dark Side. At that point, Vader saves Luke by hurling the Emperor to his death. Having gone to the Death Star to save Vader, Luke accepts responsibility for the death. Mara agrees harshly, but for the present needs Luke alive.

Chapters 14-16 Analysis

Chapter 14 shows Thrawn's "hit-and-fade" operation against Coruscant from both sides' perspective, beginning dramatically with the defenders. The wail of a battle alert awakens Leia from yet another nightmare, this time with C'baoth menacing Luke and Mara. Ignoring the vision for the time being, Leia races to the war room, where the ever-deepening chaos is richly described. Ackbar, the undisputed military leader is away on inspections, leaving at best competent subordinates to counter an indisputably brilliant tactician. The New Republic's best tactician, Bel Iblis, whose success against Thrawn has been seen as modest at best, is moodily waiting for his old rival, the power-hungry Mon Mothma, to recognize his abilities and ask him to assume command. Leia, who appears to enjoy universal recognition and even veneration (left unexplained), steps in to mediate, and is frustrated by bureaucracy, and in the end sees them mawkishly patch up their long feud for the good of the New Republic.

Action shifts to Chimaera's bridge, where New Republic counterstrikes have little effect. Thrawn's earlier contention to C'baoth that military training and experience are indispensable is reinforced when Thrawn recognizes the moment Bel Iblis assumes command and orders the kind of strategic retreat he himself would. When the field of battle is sufficiently clear that Bel Iblis can concentrate on Thrawn's demonstration, Thrawn orders the cloaked asteroids deployed. The mechanism by which "dry shots" far exceed the number of actual deployments and dangerously overheat the machinery is confusing in its technicality, but the reader can understand the motivation: prevent the New Republic from knowing how many space hazards it must clear before it can open the planetary shield. When a New Republic spacecraft accidentally collides with an unknown physical object, Bel Iblis orders intensive fire along its flight vector to disable the cloaking and capture whatever it is. Playing cat-and-mouse, Thrawn allows his adversaries to see it is an asteroid before destroying the evidence. Clearly, the New Republic will be occupied for some time in clearing its skies — and figuring out when they are clear.

As a twist, Mara's disappearance is discovered and Leia has to admit her family and friends' part in the plot. The escape has to be covered up to prevent word being leaked to the Empire, which would reinforce Wayland, dooming the tiny, foolhardy strike force. Obscure Ghent's discovery of Delta Source's encrypt code gives Leia a powerful weapon, but she must figure out how best to use it. The resulting search for a spy or spies will bring together several strands that have been left dangling.



Chapter 15 begins setting up for the next smugglers' gathering, as Karrde and Gillespie discuss the plunge in morale as the Empire refrains from striking back against them, and spying for the New Republic has not only turned up nothing on clone shipments, but is failing to pay the bills. Karrde proposes his insider, Ghent, tap the New Republic coffers to keep the operation afloat.

Karrde's pet vornskrs are introduced as an opportunity to explain further the phenomenon of Force-free bubbles, in preparation for the crucial role these play in the coming battle on Wayland. The vornskrs' names, Drang and Sturm, suggest the 18th-century German literary movement, but this develops into no more than a superficial reference. In a quick shift back to Chimaera, Mazzic is brought in for a good scare and Ferrier is given his next assignment. The value of Ferrier's invisible Defel is made clear: it will plant false evidence against Karrde while Ferrier remains conspicuous, providing himself an alibi.

Chapter 16 shifts focus for the first time to Wayland, a richly-forested planet reminiscent of the moon of Endor where an impossibly small strike force once destroys a key facility. The fighters set down at a safe distance from the mountain, but soon find they cannot use repulsorlift-based transportation. This puts them into a long walk menaced by all of nature. The degree of menace allows other characters, hinted at during the landing, to come to the party's aid in later chapters.

Luke finally sets Mara straight on how the Emperor dies. True Star Wars fans will be relieved, for each time Mara has remembered it wrongly. The facts, however, do not suggest even to Luke that Mara will not yet make an attempt on his life. The tension is relieved only in the last pages of the novel.



Chapters 17-20

Chapters 17-20 Summary

As they walk toward the Assemblage Chamber through the crowded Grand Corridor, Winter briefs Leia on a bounty hunter offering to sell information on activity at the Imperial shipyards at Ord Trasi, where three Star Destroyers near completion. It is one of 50 one-minute scripts they have run over three days, intended to smoke out Delta Source. Ghent is set up in a tiny, long-forgotten space to run his decrypting program. Among the latest group of messages transmitted is one of their decoys, which Winter recalls only 47 people overhear. Correlating this against an earlier hit, they have 127 suspects. Leia doubts any has access to all 15 teasers that have been passed. She dismisses high-ranking Councilor Tevv as a suspect and points out that Ghent's program must exclude those who hear data that is not later transmitted.

Bel Iblis brings Leia the latest on locating the swarm of asteroids. He finds it hard to believe there could be multiple spies in Coruscant and suggests looking for an "exotic recording system" that Security could overlook. In the war room with Rieekan and Drayson, they watch a remote-controlled transport dump a cloud of brilliant dust that expands as it is polarized by a negative ion beam in hopes an invisible asteroid will fly through and disturb it. It is a slow method, but the best they have without a CGT (Crystal Gravitation Trap) array, all of which are in Imperial regions. As the brass debates options, a third cloud creates turbulence and Harrier fires at will. When a chunk of rock is revealed, Allegiant moves in to collect it. Another accidental collision with a transport brings on a massive but fruitless barrage of fire.

Winter fetches Leia back to Ghent's room to receive bad news. Improved filtering programs yield zero suspects. Delta Source appears not to discriminate between vital materials and trivia. Bel Iblis thinks Delta Source might be on to them, but Leia has picked up no malice or suspicion while monitoring during staged conversations. In that case, there is a spy nest at work. Leia revisits the idea of a recording system in the Grand Corridor, where all the transmitted conversations take place. How a system might have eluded Security is debated and the masses of protocol, maintenance, and messenger droids that move through the crowd all day fall suspect. As Bremen conducts a thorough, standard Security sweep. Leia and Winter watch closely for any droids to slip away but see none. Leia notices an MN-2E maintenance droid clucking softly as it prunes ch'hala trees. As she watches the color shifts timed to the clucks, Leia summons Bremen. Eight meters down, Security finds ancient wiring buried in the ch'hala tree's taproot. All the "organic microphones" going back to the Emperor's day, are dug up and destroyed.

Karrde is displeased that Ferrier appears on Hijarna and wonders why Mazzic arrives so heavily protected. Reports of movement in the shadows around Wild Karrde cause alarm, but no evidence of a break-in is found. Karrde wishes that Mara were by his side, having heard vague rumors of an unnamed woman being arrested on Coruscant for



assisting a commando raid. Mazzic insists that they meet aboard Wild Karrde. With a blaster to his temple, Karrde leads the principle smugglers aboard, leaving their entourages outside to face off against one another. In the wardroom, Karrde surrenders his ship's data cards pads, which Par'tah and Ellor reluctantly analyze.

Based on Thrawn's information, Mazzic charges that someone staged the raid on Trogan and only Karrde has an interest in fomenting trouble against the Empire. Karrde reminds them of Thrawn's love of convoluted games and personal vendetta and points out that Imperial records can be altered. Knowing that Defel has planted false evidence, Karrde mentions the break-in. With the evidence found, Karrde asks why he would be this foolish, suggests Ferrier's vehemence reveals a guilty conscience, and notes that the wraith's presence cannot be accounted for. Blustering, Ferrier mentions Kosk by name, which is not yet on the record. No one remains on Ferrier's side.

Ferrier pulls out a thermal detonator, summons the hiding wraith, and orders Karrde to fly him to his ship. Unseen, Ferrier uses external lights to alert his men. By the time they reach the Corellian Gunship, Defel has been overcome. Ferrier disables the fire control panel, races to his ship, and casts a "Conner net" over Wild Karrde to assure his get away. As Ferrier is shot down, the original meeting commences.

For two and a half days, nature is not kind to them, but they no longer see predators or natives, who Luke senses are out there. An empty clawbird nest and then a clawbird carcass, clearly knifed while in flight, raise suspicions. Mara believes it may be the work of the Mynyrshi, early colonists who dislike humans. Through the Force Luke and Mara both detect alien minds headed towards them and then scared away. As Luke talks about training Leia in the Force as best he can and worries about the responsibility of training her children, Mara sees how serious he is. When Luke asks about her training at the Emperor's hands, Mara hears, "YOU WILL KILL LUKE SKYWALKER," and fights off the reflexive hatred. Luke offers her a "refresher course" in the Force as they continue toward Mt. Tantiss, to prepare her for whatever her destiny is.

Ackbar gravely addresses starfighter squadron commanders, talking about resolve and morale slipping as the Empire tests the New Republic's very survival. General Madine then describes the situation at Coruscant and the need for getting a crystal gravfield trap from lightly-protected Tangrene or heavily-defended Bilbringi, the last place the Empire expects. Victory there will also damage the enemy's shipbuilding capability and tarnish Thrawn's image. Colonel Derlin will lead a feint to Tangrene. Meanwhile, on Coruscant, Leia awakens again from a nightmare, assures her Noghri bodyguards that she is fine, drawing strength from their confidence in her as Vader's daughter.

After a 30-hour battle, the Rebels retreat from Xa Fel, and Thrawn orders that nothing be done to scare off the Rebels massing at Tangrene in order to obtain a CGT array. Meanwhile, in a tapcafe, Karrde shares with Gillespie and Mazzic data he has collected on the Rebels' bold tactics and proposes that they steal a CGT from Bilbringi while Thrawn is busy at Tangrene. Karrde will use spies and Ghent's hacking to determine the time of the Tangrene raid to coordinate their own attack. He himself heads for Coruscant, where Councilors are reviewing macrobinocular footage of the Ukio attack,



showing that the Star Destroyer's blast does not penetrate the planetary shield. Something intervenes, proving the Empire's super weapon is a clever fraud, doubtless drawing on C'baoth's powers. Karrde provides the data and takes a liberal allowance from a credit line set up by Luke. Members are indignant at this irregularity, but Mon Mothma forbids closing the credit line because the New Republic needs all the allies it can get. Drayson fears misinformation and profiteering but is overruled.

Winter enters and whispers to Leia as Drayson begins his report on Bilbringi and produces a data card giving Wayland's coordinates. She angers the Council by claiming the source is "reliable" but confidential. Bel Iblis rules that nothing can be done about Wayland until after Bilbringi, to which all resources are committed. Fey'lya breaks his long silence to suggest postponing Bilbringi in favor of attacking Wayland. He argues that with the shield protecting Coruscant, asteroid-hunting is unnecessary, and the Emperor's storehouse holds things that must never fall into Thrawn's hands. Mon Mothma overrules him and asks Drayson to outline the feint on Tangrene, leaving Leia to wonder what about the mountain so frightens Fey'lya.

Pellaeon resents having Rukh, Thrawn's arrogant Noghri bodyguard, play with him before admitting him to the Grand Admiral's private command room. Thrawn is looking at two very different styles of art along with a tactical hologram of Tangrene, Mon Calamari, and Corellian, to help him gain insight into Ackbar and Bel Iblis. Pellaeon reports that the Rebels continue subtly edging towards the Imperial trap. Intelligence shows a 94% probability that Tangrene is their true target, but Thrawn believes they will go for Bilbringi and orders counter forces directed there. Pellaeon sees this as insanity.

Chapters 17-20 Analysis

In Chapter 17, Leia and Winter perform plausible scripts for Delta Source to overhear and transmit, but collation programs fail to identify a lone spy. The odds against at least 15 spies working in Coruscant is unlikely, and no droid gives itself away during a security sweep. Leia hits upon the color-shifting, sound-sensitive ch'hala plants that feature so prominently in Chapter 11, when Han confronts the Security chief, who now comes to dig up the plants that date from the Emperor's time. The magnificent trees are sacrificed without qualm—or editorial comment, as a long technical discussion of how they serve as a microphone grows tedious. Tedious, too, is the description of how cloaked asteroids are smoked out in low orbit. One is uncloaked and captured according to plan, but another hits a transport and cannot be tracked. It is clear that the asteroids will present a greater problem than finding the spy and will be as much a matter of luck. First mention is made of CGT arrays and the Ord Trasi shipyards, pointing to the novel's climax. Notice how touchy the leadership is about offending one another and how Fey'lya's false accusation against Ackbar has taken on the status of legend. It is probably not meant to be didactic, but it demonstrates how excessive political correctness can be debilitating.

Chapter 18 is filled with intrigue as the smugglers meet on Hijarna and once again shady Ferrier is among them and anxious to get started. The meeting opens with Karrde



worried about reports of movement in the shadows near his parked ship, but no evidence of foul play has been found. Mazzic, fresh from having been scared to death by Thrawn, asks—and then demands at gunpoint—to hold the meeting aboard Wild Karrde. Karrde figures out too late that the shadowy Defel has planted incriminating, false evidence against him and he has no choice but to create factions among the smugglers. Ferrier twists and turns and talks too much for his own good, eventually mentioning facts not on the record.

Cornered, Ferrier pulls out a thermal detonator, reminiscent of Luke's ploy in Jabba the Hutt's palace, to which frequent reference is made, because these smugglers profit much from Jabba's demise and the dividing up of his vast enterprise. Unmasked, Ferrier flees, sure that he has disabled pursuit, but is killed. Karrde still wants to make a go of profiting by selling to the New Republic and suggests they hold their intended business meeting.

Brief Chapter 19 shows the New Republic band advancing through the forest of Wayland and strangely losing contact with predators and natives. The odd phenomena they are observing become important later in the novel, as does Luke's offer to supplement Mara's training in the Force. Focus then shifts to hear the New Republic high command laying out an attack on the recently-hit Bilbringi and a feint against Tangrene. Making Thrawn look fallible is a major goal of the risky operation, for his reputation is helping to dispirit the Rebels.

Chapter 20 opens with yet another Imperial conquest and examines both sides' views on the upcoming climactic battle for Tangrene or Bilbringi. Both see victory in this confrontation as decisive in the drawn-out war. Both sides' top leaders are dedicated to an inflexible plan. Both sides have second-tier naysayers. In between, stand the smuggler remnant who see an opportunity to profit by sneaking into Bilbringi to recover what the Rebels are willing to devote massive resources to capturing and then selling it to them. Leia and Luke both raise the conservative Councilors' ire by acting independently and trusting suspicious characters such as Mara and Karrde. Mon Mothma declares that the New Republic needs any allies it can get and overrides Fey'lya's dramatic call for an immediate attack on Wayland. Mon Mothma breaking his long silence underlines the unnamed dangers that lurk on Wayland, which only he seems to perceive. Chapter 20 ends with Rukh's shady character being highlighted to set up the novel's finale, and showing Thrawn unconcerned that Delta Source has been silenced, for despite overwhelming statistical odds, he is certain his plan is about to crush the Rebellion.



Chapters 21-25

Chapters 21-25 Summary

Luke drills Mara in lightsaber combat as Artoo squeals they have found signs that someone is helping them by clearing a path. At nightfall, Luke and Mara sense two groups nearby and Han, Luke, and Chewie investigate. They find Ekhrikhor clan Bakh'tor, a Noghri, who says the Myneyrshi and Psadans want to talk and who gives Luke a stuffed clawbird as a sign of truce. Ekhrikhor assures the Myneyrsh that these people will free them from Imperial domination. The Psadan chief recalls at length the oppression of his people. Threepio translates as best he can. Chewie's presence, armed, shows that Wookiees are not slaves. They grant safe passage to the forbidden mountain. Meanwhile, nearing Wayland, C'baoth and Covell chat about power being the commanding of others' souls. C'baoth looks forward to having company and, reaching out in the Force, sees Luke and Mara. Covell is losing mental control. A Noghri talks about the "son of Vader" and is surprised that Mara does not know Luke's heritage. She realizes the Emperor is demanding revenge on his killer's son. She next hears C'baoth's voice predict that she and Luke will kneel before him. Neither wants to face him, but it is too late to abort the mission. Luke considers that the sudden cut-off of the voice might mean ysalamiri have imprisoned C'baoth. Meanwhile, Chimaera hears of Covell's odd behavior and dying in his sleep. The troops he leads have been dispersed. Thrawn exchanges charges of betrayal with C'baoth and orders Colonel Selid to keep C'baoth under house arrest. Thrawn still envisages cloning C'baoth's body properly and letting it mature at a normal rate.

Rogue Squadron pilots leave a cantina where they are planting false information about Tangrene in suspected Imperial spies. Aves "rescues" them and claims to know about the upcoming raid and feint and wants to coordinate a smugglers' mission with it. Wedge says he needs 28 hours to get clearance—and hopes Aves sell this to the Empire. Meanwhile, on Coruscant, they have neutralized 21 asteroids, which Bel Iblis believes may be all of them. The Wild Karrde calls Leia and she hedges about Mara's story, insisting Karrde cannot land because of the asteroids. Karrde transmits proof that there are only 21 asteroids and demands to see Mara. He is admitted, while Leia suddenly realizes the danger Luke faces from ysalamiri on Wayland. Knowing Mon Mothma will not divide forces, Leia decides to go there. On the landing pad she tells Karrde about the mission and asks him to fly her there. When Fey'lya meets his price, Karrde agrees. They lift off immediately and are soon at light speed. Meanwhile, studying the entrance to Mt. Tantiss, Luke and Han decide to find another way in. They also see Psadans studying a data pad, which seems odd. Luke complains that the mountain is dark, like Myrkr. Han wants to quit, but Luke believes the ysalamiri are controlling C'baoth.

Bilbringi Control clears Aves' Etherway (alias Garret's Gold) to dock. Measures have been taken since Mazzic's raid to restrict flight paths. Gillespee hopes they have not worked out all the glitches for when they make their escape run. They will back up



Mazzic as he snatches the CGT at the time that the New Republic hits Tangrene. They see colleagues arriving and wonder if Thrawn knows about this and plans to catch them all. Aves reports that Karrde has something more important to do. Meanwhile, Rogue Squadron gets orders to flank Ackbar as the first wave departs for Bilbringi. They have already flown to the decoy jump-off point at Tangrene but remain sharp. Meanwhile, aboard Chimaera, intelligence makes it still seem to Pellaeon like Tangrene is the Rebel target, and Thrawn is leaving it undefended. Thrawn assures him it is illusion; the bulk of the Rebel fleet is en route to Bilbringi, to which he orders the battle fleet to proceed.

Within macrobinocular sight, the air intakes on Mt. Tantiss present a mighty obstacle and Luke cannot reach out to see what lies beyond. Distant blaster fire erupts. Before Luke cuts through the thick grating, Mara asks him to promise to kill her rather than let her fall into C'baoth's hands. This is against the Jedi code, but Luke promises to be beside her and reminds her that her destiny is in her own hands, not in any voice in her head. Artoo learns that the main entrance is under attack. The timing seems too convenient, but the Rebels make quick use of it. Artoo shuts down the intake systems. Leaving one Noghri as a rear guard, they head into the tunnel. Meanwhile, as Karrde spots Mt. Tantiss, Leia cannot feel Luke's mind in the Force. Using a fake ID code, Karrde learns of the firefight and is diverted north. Using navigation lights and Noghri recognition signals, they find the rearguard and report a repulsor malfunction as they land. Fearing it is too late, Leia runs inside with Karrde with his vornskrs on leashes.

As alarms hoot, Han and Chewie take out guards at the first blast door, which Luke opens by tripping an internal mechanism with his lightsaber; the Imperials inside are rapidly dispatched. Artoo plugs into "vintage" hardware to snoop. Han and Lando join Mara gazing at a cavern in whose center runs the massive equipment column. It sounds like it is breathing as a result of the thousands of Spaarti cloning cylinders arranged on circular balconies extending ten stories down. It is a very big facility for the few explosives they have brought, but Mara reveals there is a self-destruct switch in the throne room. Luke offers to accompany her. As Artoo searches for schematics on the column, he discovers that C'baoth is in the throne room, but Han's interruptions keep Threepio from getting the information across quickly. With comlinks inoperable, Han chases after Luke.

At Bilbringi, Aves prepares to receive outbound course data when Mazzic seems to be arriving right on time. Instead, a complete Imperial attack force pours out of hyperspace everywhere, trapping Karrde's whole operation. Aves and Gillespee are surprised to see the ships take entrapment positions outward rather than attack positions on them. The New Republic is not attacking Tangrene, but Bilbringi and is about to be pulled out of hyperspace and pounded. The smugglers can only watch and wait. Meanwhile, Mara and Luke encounter stormtroopers and without the Force fight inefficiently but lethally. They ride up four levels to the throne room and Mara steps out into a "flood of memories." A magnificent hologram of the galaxy sparkles before the Throne. Remembering Thrawn's purposes, Mara heads to the throne to look for the switch. Catwalks run overhead. C'baoth swivels on the throne and welcomes them to his service.



Chapters 21-25 Analysis

Chapter 21 shows the Rebel party meeting Wayland's Myneyrsh and Psadan leaders, who are setting aside mutual enmity to decide what to do about the newcomers. The Noghri, who have followed the Falcon to help out and have kept themselves hidden up to this point, sensing on Coruscant Han's hostility toward them, serve as mediators. All three people have been brutally oppressed by the forces of the Empire—whose leadership is nearly completely human. Mara learns that the Noghri are resolved to be free, having realized how they have been duped, and are organizing uprisings everywhere. Threepio serves competently but is harried as a three-way translator, and finally has to resort to summaries to keep up. Han recalls the humiliation of the Ewoks divinizing Threepio and adopting him into their clan and sees diplomacy might be in order. Negotiations result in safe passage to the mountain.

Meanwhile, approaching Wayland, C'baoth is shown controlling the mind of General Covell and enjoying talking with him about this ultimate power. The Emperor had been a fool for not controlling Vader completely and paid the price. C'baoth reaches out chillingly to touch Mara and Luke's minds, talking about their destiny to kneel before him. He has told Covell that he looks to many Jedi ending his loneliness. When the voice cuts off suddenly, Luke considers that C'baoth may have been subdued by ysalamiri. Note that the Force has not been serving Luke too well on Wayland. The elements of the final battle are falling into place.

Chapter 22 shows C'baoth back on Wayland but thwarted from seizing control. He does not calculate the effect of the ysalamiri that surround the old Imperial suite and has removed too much of Covell's brain for it to survive when they enter the Force-bubble. Planning to clone C'baoth safely to serve as his ally, Thrawn appears far more sinister than earlier in the novel—more in the way the smugglers have been speaking of him. In a cloak-and-dagger interlude, Karrde's men rescue the Rogue Squadron pilots who have been roving about trying to get bogus information on the next day's missions through to Imperial Intelligence. Wedge still considers smugglers as mercenaries and scum.

Brief Chapter 23 deals primarily with Karrde's unexpected visit to Coruscant to pick up Mara and give Ghent a few more undercover assignments. Leia equivocates as best she can and uses the cloaked asteroids as an excuse for not allowing him to see Mara. Karrde, however, produces data he records at Bilbringi that strongly suggests the New Republic has captured the lot. The havoc that even a single impact on the surface could have is reiterated, but Karrde is give a five-second window through the planetary shield. The power of concentrated ysalamiri is made clear, as Leia remembers Luke being unable to use the Force while rescuing Karrde from Chimaera. This is the clearest exposition yet of their earlier dealings. It is also hinted that Karrde looks on Mara with more than professional eyes, although he denies it. He acts the crass mercenary when Fey'lya appears in the shadow to plead for the good of his planet and the galaxy. Leia voices the reader's wonder at what the mountain conceals that can so agitate the retiring Bothan.



Chapter 24 takes place entirely on Wayland as the Rebel party approaches the forbidden mountain on their probably impossible task. The Myneyrshi want to help and follow them inside, cavalierly accepted as diversions for enemy shooters, while the Psadans from town, controlled by C'baoth, demand his release and riot at the front entrance. It could be too convenient an event, but worth seizing upon. The mood grows serious as Mara begs Luke to kill her if it looks like she will fall into C'baoth's hands, and she is not comforted by his patronizing speech. When and if she will kill him remains an open question. Luke notices she enters the mountain looking frightened and determined and hopes she is up to what lies ahead. Both are frustrated to be without the Force. So is Leia as she and Karrde arrive, land near the air intakes using another of Ghent's forged codes, and prepare to enter. Karrde takes his vornskrs, hoping they can track Mara.

Chapter 25 picks up the action inside Mt. Tantiss as the Rebels with awe and foreboding gaze at the massive cavern housing the cloning units, so numerous that the cavern seems to breathe. Ten stories of concentric circles of cylinders cannot help evoking Dante's vision of hell. The more immediate image for Star Wars fans is the control column into which Obi Wan sneaks to free the Falcon. When Han laments they have carried insufficient quantities of explosives to destroy it, Mara conveniently remembers that the Emperor has a self-destruct switch built into his throne. She and Luke head to the throne room. Action switches rapidly and briefly back to Bilbringi, as Imperial forces sweep out of hyperspace and position themselves, not to capture the smugglers, but to prepare to ambush Ackbar's approaching forces. Another quick segue, and C'baoth swivels slowly in the Emperor's throne and greets his future apprentices.



Chapters 26-29

Chapters 26-29 Summary

Luke steps back, recalling Jomark. C'baoth claims to know they would come. He mocks Luke's naiveté in believing the Jedi are guardians of peace. When Luke reminds C'baoth that he is but a clone of the great Jedi Master, it shakes C'baoth, but he recovers to boast of rebuilding Covell's mind in his own image, as he will the thousands of Jedi minds. Pulling out a remote switch, C'baoth kills the ysalamiri and the Force returns. C'baoth disarms Mara and hits her with lightning and points to Luke's clone, Luuke. Fighting his exact duplicate creates a buzzing in Luke's head, and he wonders about turning to the Dark Side or insanity. He wants to flee but cannot abandon the weakened Mara.

Below, explosions and smoke rise from the nutrient tanks. Meanwhile, near Bilbringi, the Empire pulls Ackbar's fleet out of hyperspace, and it scrambles to survive. Inside Mt. Tantiss, Han is surprised to see Leia, Karrde, and the vornskrs. Leia reveals that the ysalamiri are gone, and they move towards the throne room. As lightsabers sizzle, Mara pictures the Emperor's end and sees how a taste of power has made C'baoth greedier and driven him insane. She is tempted to take his challenge and fight but knows she is too distracted. C'baoth sits entranced and announces Leia's arrival. When Han fires his blaster, C'baoth blocks it and goes berserk. Yelling his sister's name, Luke turns to furious attack and turns on C'baoth, demanding he release the others in return for his services. While Lando below tells Artoo to organize a retreat and prepares to implode the cavern, Mara is amazed at Luke's offer and senses his dread. C'baoth insists that Mara, too, must be his apprentice. Luuke returns to action, catching Luke off-balance and backing him against a rock wall. Mara pulls Leia's lightsaber to herself and charges C'baoth. Luuke tries to finish Luke off, but slashes the wall, exploding concealed electronics in his own face. Obeying the old voice, Mara cuts Luuke down and is free.

When Luuke is slain, Luke's mind stops buzzing. C'baoth looks furious and lost and breaks the ceiling into gravel which rains down on Mara and Luke. Needing them for his cloning tanks, he will kill neither. Below, Lando and Chewie start a two-minute fuse and escape to a lower floor as the facility is torn apart. Lando and Chewie run to Wild Karrde, hoping still to rescue those in the throne room. Waist-deep in rock, Luke again offers to help cure C'baoth, but C'baoth demands obedience or death. Free of debris, Mara charges C'baoth, fighting off his lightning blasts and a hailstorm of rock. Kneeling before C'baoth, Mara strikes upward. Dark energy explodes from him, burning a hole through which Wild Karrde can pick them up.

Thrawn orders the bombardment to begin, again amazing Pellaeon that he bests Intelligence. Ackbar's flagship will be spared. Imperial fire concentrates on peripheral support ships. While Rogue Squad looks like a good target to hit, Aves calls Wedge to wonder about Tangrene, announces he is about to grab a CGT, and wants a friendly escort for the help. As Rebels pound a Golan II, Thrawn tells Pellaeon not to panic, just



as word comes from Wayland about the attack. Declaring that this is revenge for being betrayed, Rukh stabs Thrawn and Pellaeon weakly orders a retreat.

Mara watches the Imperial City peacefully as Luke joins her on the roof. She argues against accepting a post as trusted intermediary between the New Republic and Karrde's organization, but when Luke gives her his original lightsaber, she sees the past is over and she must move forward. She accompanies Luke to the conference room.

Chapters 26-29 Analysis

Chapter 26 shows Luke trying to save C'baoth as he did his father on the Death Star but being heartily rebuked. C'baoth reveals that Covell's troops have wired the ysalamiri, who are restraining him, and with the push of a button destroys them and restores the Force. He disables Mara with lighting bolts from his hands but says she will not die, and reveals a clone of Luke, made from his severed hand at Bespin, doubtless sample B-2332-54, the Emperor's "prize," which C'baoth earlier demands delivered to him. C'baoth further reveals that he has been producing clones in his own likeness and controlling their minds. Luke and Luuke set to in a swashbuckling lightsaber duel. The Force is muddled, having two identical beings calling on it. Chapter 26 then shifts rapidly to show the nutrient tanks mysteriously exploding, the New Republic fleet trapped at Bilbringi, and Leia and Karrde meeting up with Han en route to the throne room where the battle rages.

Chapter 27 picks up the action in the throne room, with C'baoth seeming to dominate everything that is happening. When Han fires at him, however, C'baoth goes berserk. Seeing self-sacrifice as the only way to save his friends, Luke makes the dramatic offer, but C'baoth insists that Mara be part of the deal. Obtaining Leia's lost lightsaber, Mara cuts Luuke Skywalker down, freeing herself from the Emperor's mental clutches. Meanwhile, time grows short as Lando and Chewie prepare to implode the mountain.

Chapter 28 opens with the Rebels encircled. Thrawn will spare Ackbar's flagship to take the disastrous news back to Coruscant, but knows the Rebels will believe someone has betrayed them. As the Imperials open fire, betrayal indeed begins, as Wedge and Aves agree on a diversion that the prejudiced Ackbar probably would not authorize. Action returns to Wayland as C'baoth lashes out at those who dare kill Luuke. Below, explosions begin the destruction of the cloning facility, with a mass blast planned to implode the whole mountain. Idealistic Luke tries one last time to save C'baoth before Mara endures all C'baoth can throw at her and slays him from a kneeling position, making his prophecy come true. Meanwhile, aboard Coruscant, Thrawn is slain by his Noghri bodyguard and sees the beauty of the attack. With the death of the last Grand Admiral, the Empire is doomed. Pellaeon, throughout the novel the voice of prudence, orders the retreat.

Chapter 29 provides a brief wrap-up: the Empire is in retreat but the New Republic wants Mara to serve as trusted intermediary between the Republic and Karrde's smugglers. The gift of Luke's original lightsaber convinces Mara to accept the role.



Characters

Grand Admiral Thrawn

The novel's most central character but by no means its protagonist, Thrawn has been commander of the Empire's efforts to destroy the Rebellion since the deaths of the Emperor and Darth Vader six years before *The Last Command* opens. Thrawn is sparingly described as having blue-black eyebrows, glowing red eyes, and wearing the pure white uniform of a Grand Admiral. He speaks with "deadly calm," displays no discernible patterns, favorite strategies, or weaknesses; studies his enemies and tailors his attacks to exploit weaknesses, and is versatile. He studies the artwork of people he is about to attack, looking for psychological clues to their weaknesses. Little mention is made of how Thrawn suffers discrimination as a non-human, other than he returns from exile in the Unknown Regions to take command and makes the Star Destroyer *Chimaera* his flagship. He is producing massive numbers of clones at Mt. Tantiss, the Emperor's storehouse on Wayland.

As the novel opens, Thrawn is attacking Ukio to obtain grain to feed his clones and make Rebels believe he has discovered a way to penetrate planetary shields. In fact, it is a ploy coordinated by the Master Jedi Joruu C'baoth, who Thrawn detests but needs to complete his plans. C'baoth views Thrawn in the same way and they lock horns several times, each time revealing more clearly C'baoth's insanity. Thrawn cloaks captured asteroids and releases them above Coruscant to force its planetary shield to close and keep it out of the war for a long time. Thrawn continues making brilliant tactical moves, earning a reputation for infallibility but frustrating his aide, Capt. Pellaeon, including attacking Bilbringi when every indication is the Rebels are massing at Tangrene.

Bilbringi proves Thrawn's Waterloo, for Princess Leia Organa Solo has convinced the Noghri, Thrawn's army of silent killers, that they have been treacherously used. As he watches his forces pound the Rebels, Thrawn learns of the battle on Wayland, just before being fatally stabbed by his Noghri bodyguard, Rukh. The last Imperial Grand Admiral's last words are, "It was so artistically done." Pellaeon weakly orders a retreat.

Master Joruu C'baoth

A clone of the long-dead Jedi Knight, C'baoth is the novel's villain, said often to be far more evil than the late Emperor and Darth Vader. C'baoth first appears accompanying Grand Admiral Thrawn during his attack on Ukio, using the Force to control precision firing by cloaked cruisers to simulate a laser penetration of Ukio's planetary defense shield, convincing the authorities to surrender. C'baoth reads and controls minds, having grown rapidly in the Force since his last attempt a month earlier. He considers himself heir to the late Emperor and the essence of the Empire. Thrawn and his aide Pellaeon detest C'baoth. Prior to *The Last Command* C'baoth failed to make Luke Skywalker and



Mara Jade his apprentices, but undeterred, C'baoth adds Princess Leia Organa Solo and her twins to his list. Before the Battle of Ukio, C'baoth announces he wants a special clone prepared inside Mt. Tantiss, using sample B-2332-54, the Emperor's "prize." This produces Luuke Skywalker by the time of the novel's climax.

As the novel progresses, C'baoth's madness and megalomania grow and conflicts with Thrawn are frequent. At one point C'baoth demands to attack Coruscant to seize the Solos and takes control of half the ship's crew to prove his power. He is deflated when Thrawn reminds him how taxing it will be to sustain that for five days, plus C'baoth knows nothing about military tactics. As Thrawn goes ahead with the attack on his own terms, C'baoth demands immediate transportation to Wayland, site of the hidden cloning facility. By the time he arrives, he has replaced General Covell's mind with his own, resulting in Covell's death when they hit the zone where ysalamiri knock out the Force. Knowing that Luke and Mara will come to fight him, C'baoth kills the ysalamiri and demands Luke and Mara's allegiance. Both fight him and Luuke—C'baoth inflicts great suffering on them, but in the end Mara kneels before him and thrusts upward with her lightsaber. Dark forces explode from the dead Jedi and the cloning facility is destroyed.

Luke Skywalker and Luuke Skywalker

In the six years that have elapsed since the final Star Wars battle, Luke has undertaken many missions on behalf of the New Republic. He is haunted by a battle with the dark Jedi Master Joruss C'baoth at Jomark where, deprived of the Force, he and Mara Jade narrowly escape. Luke regrets that he impetuously cut short his training under Jedi Master Yoda and often has to struggle using the Force.

As this novel begins, Luke is first seen on Calius, seeking hard evidence that the Empire is producing and deploying clones. There he meets an old acquaintance, a smuggler, Talon Karrde, who he cannot convince to throw in with the New Republic but recruits to pass information he comes across. Without Council authorization, Luke offers Karrde a liberal credit line. This will later get Luke and Leia in trouble but produces several vital pieces of intelligence. Luke next flies to Poderis, where he is nearly trapped by stormtroopers wearing ysalamiri harnesses to block the Force. He is allowed to escape into space, where he uses a classic ploy to elude capture. Damage to his X-wing takes Luke to Honoghr, where he is greeted as "Vader's son," and Leia's sister. He then returns to Coruscant to learn about spying and the arrest of Mara, who has vowed to kill him. With Han and Mara, Luke flies to Wayland to confront the deranged Master Jedi Joruss C'baoth. He is forced to fight to the death with C'baoth's apprentice, cloned from cells that come from Luke's hand, cut off by Darth Vader long ago at Cloud City. Luuke nearly kills Luke with Luke's original lightsaber before Mara cuts Luuke down. The idealist Luke tries to save C'baoth but is rejected, so Luke offers to be C'baoth's apprentice if he will free the others in the party. C'baoth rejects this, too, and while Luke is dazed and half-buried in rocks, Mara kills the Dark Jedi.



Princess/Counselor Leia Organa Solo

A native of the destroyed planet Alderaan, daughter of an original leader of the Rebellion and his successor on the Council, Leia begins this novel married to Han Solo and pregnant with twins. The insane Master Jedi Joruu C'baoth is intent on kidnapping Leia and her offspring to train them as dark apprentices (along with Lei's brother, Luke Skywalker, and Mara Jade) in order to rule the universe. One attempt has been made to capture her on the planet Honoghr, where she gives the native Noghri ecological advice on saving their ruined planet. Retaining reverence for Leia's biological father, Darth Vader, the Noghri call her "Lady Vader" and "Mal'ary'ush" (savior). She has added Honoghr to the list of safe planets on which Luke can land in Imperial-controlled regions.

In the course of the novel, the Imperial Grand Admiral Thrawn dispatches commandos to effect the kidnapping, leading Leia to recruit a Noghri bodyguard for Coruscant. Using her under-developed powers of the Force, she hears Mara's warnings to escape the commandos and sticks up for Mara when Mara is implicated in the plot. She tries to convince Mara that the voice Mara hears telling her to kill Luke does not emanate from within her and can be ignored. When Mara remembers the location of Wayland, the hidden planet where Thrawn is creating clones, Leia helps break her out of detention and faces the wrath of the New Republic Council. Knowing no reinforcements will be sent to help Mara, Luke, and Han, Leia goes to Wayland and joins in the battle.

Mara Jade

Mysterious Mara Jada has a long history prior to the opening of this novel, all of which is germane to her behavior but which comes out bit by bit in the course of the novel. Stolen by the Emperor from her parents as a child, Mara is unorthodoxly trained in use of the Force, and serves as the "Emperor's Hand," carrying orders throughout the Empire. She lives comfortably in the Imperial Palace and hears the Emperor's voice everywhere. Mara beholds the Emperor's death at—she believes—the hands of Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker and goes through life bereft and hearing in her head the Emperor's last command: "You will kill Luke Skywalker." At some point she and Luke rescue the smuggler Talon Karrde and she becomes Karrde's protégé. At Myrkr, she and Luke face the Master Jedi Joruu C'baoth, who tries to recruit them to the Dark Side and then to kill them. Just before *The Last Command* opens, Luke has rescued Mara from drifting in space and left her with Ghent at Coruscant to recover after undergoing neural path reconstruction.

Mara is first met in this novel waking up after a month at Coruscant and wanting to get back to Karrde. She seethes at being considered a guest in the Imperial Palace. She openly tells Princess Leia Organa Solo of her intentions to kill Luke. Imperial Grand Admiral Thrawn, knowing that Mara knows the secret location of his cloning facility at Wayland, needs at least to discredit her if not kidnap her, and sends commandos to take her out while kidnapping Leia and her twins to become his apprentices. Implicated by



the surviving commando leader, Mara is put under detention. Luke and Leia break her out so she can lead a raid on Wayland. Luke tells her the truth about how the Emperor dies but she cannot shake the voice. He gives her a refresher course in the Force as they travel and hopes she will rightly fulfill her destiny. She asks him to kill her rather than let her fall into C'baoth's hands. Debilitated by C'baoth's lightening, Mara watches Luke battle his clone, Luuke, and rallies to kill the latter. This frees her of the voice in her head. She goes on to fulfill C'baoth's prophecy that she will kneel before him—but only to thrust upward with her lightsaber and kill him.

Admiral Ackbar

A bug-eyed Mon Calamari, Ackbar is Supreme Commander of the Rebel Alliance Fleet during the decisive Battle of Endor almost six years before the beginning of this novel. After that, he is accused of treason and embezzlement by Councilor Borsk Fey'lya before the battle of Sluis Van. By the time *The Last Command* opens, Ackbar is vindicated and restored to command but is worn out by the time Imperial Grand Admiral Thrawn conquers Ukio and Woostri using mysterious shield-piercing weapons. Ackbar is away from Coruscant on inspections when Thrawn lays siege, and the Republic has to scramble to organize adequate defenses. Ackbar returns to head the raid on Bilbringi, which is ambushed. For spite, Thrawn orders Ackbar's flagship spared so he can bring word of the crushing defeat back to Coruscant. Thrawn's assassination saves Ackbar this humiliation.

Wedge Antilles

The leader of the Old Republic's famed "Rogue Squadron" with which Luke Skywalker once flew, Wedge continues to protect the New Republic fleet of capital warships, flying X-wing fighters. He is present when Bel Iblis is ambushed in the outer sectors, passes false information to Imperial Intelligence, and flies both the decoy mission to Tangrene and the real mission to Bilbringi, where he offers escort to the smuggler Aves without getting permission from Admiral Ackbar.

Artoo and ThreeCpo

Droids that have long accompanied Luke Skywalker on his adventures, Artoo is a squat, chirping astromech that flies missions in space and on earth is more often in the company of Han Solo and the Wookiee Chewbacca. ThreeCpo is a golden, anthropomorphic protocol droid who translates Artoo's chirps and warbles into understandable forms and annoys Han and Chewie by his prissy chatter and bragging about being fluent in over six million forms of communication. The droids are present at Wayland, Artoo breaking into the computers to find how to disable the cloning facility and Threepio serving as messenger when communications are interrupted.



General Garm Bel Iblis

An early pillar of the Rebellion and tactical genius, Bel Iblis goes his own way as Mon Mothma consolidates power and only recently crosses paths with fellow Corellian Han Solo. Bel Iblis joins in the Katana battle, is welcomed back by Mon Mothma but sent to inspect defenses in the outer sectors. Admiral Ackbar wants Bel Iblis returned to Coruscant quickly. When the Empire uses interdiction gravity to pull its fleet out of hyperspace with precision and manages to destroy a third of Bel Iblis' capital fleet, he needs all of his legendary skill to prevent a rout. Upon receiving Lando Calrissian's distress call, Bel Iblis proceeds to Nomad City and takes Lando to Coruscant to plead his case for military help in salvaging his mining operation.

Bel Iblis is thus on Coruscant when the Empire executes a "hit-and-fade" attack. In Ackbar's absence, senior officers are at best competent and certainly not up to matching Imperial Grand Admiral Thrawn's tactics, but Bel Iblis waits childishly for Mon Mothma to invite him to take command. When she humbles herself and does so, Thrawn sees an immediate change in the New Republic's response to his attack. Bel Iblis remains in the forefront of plans to eliminate the cloaked asteroids that menace Coruscant and for a raid on the Bilbringi shipyard.

Brasck

A major spokesman at the smugglers meeting at Whistler's Whirlpool on the planet Trogan, Brasck opposes Talon Karrde's proposal to cooperate with the New Republic, admitting he is eloquent but fails to make his case. The Empire pays well for smuggled goods, Brasck maintains, and Thrawn is a particularly fearsome warlord. Brasck has gray-green skin, wears body armor, and has a body guard.

Colonel Bremen

The foul-humored Security chief on Coruscant, Bremen insists on giving Mara Jade "the full treatment," including close interrogation after she is implicated in the Imperial commandos' invasion of the Palace. He is a consistent thorn in the side of Princess Leia Organa Solo.

Lando Calrissian

A gambler and entrepreneur, Lando enters this novel having had the Empire steal a second thriving business, Nomad City, from him. He refers many times to loss of Bespin, Cloud City, earlier in his dealings with Han Solo and Luke Skywalker. He previously resigned his General's commission, giving rise to bad feelings with Admiral Ackbar. In this novel Lando reverts to being Han Solo and Chewbacca's partner in the Battle of Wayland after the New Republic deny him minimal military forces to rescue Nomad City from oblivion.



Chewbacca

A fierce Wookiee, Chewbacca ("Chewie") remains in this novel Han Solo's partner and sworn protector for life, extending his oath to Solo's wife Leia Organa Solo and their newborn twins. Chewie's speech, intelligible to Han and Lando Calrissian, is said to be a "rumbling" or a "growling," with positive and negative responses being discernible even when the gist of his messages are not. Chewie is mechanically adept and keeps the Millennium Falcon running as smoothly as possible. He is a sure shot with the bowcaster.

General Covell

Commander of the occupation force on Ukio at the beginning of the novel, Covell later is assigned to take command of the Imperial garrison at Wayland, although he is not fond of clones, who make up the majority of his command. Accompanying Master Jedi Joruu C'baoth to Wayland, Covell has his mind taken over, orders his troops to booby trap the ysalamiri that restrain the Force thus keeping C'baoth prisoner, and disperses them into the forest. C'baoth stays by Covell's side until bedtime, and Covell is found dead in his bed in the morning, half his brain having disappeared.

The Emperor

Nearly six years dead when this novel opens, the Emperor remains a major force, having trained Mara Jade in basic Jedi techniques and as he plunged to his death at the hands of Darth Vader, commanded her to kill Luke Skywalker. The insane Master Jedi Joruu C'baoth is intent on surpassing the Emperor to control not just star systems but lesser beings' very minds.

Niles Ferrier and Defel

A notorious ship thief, Ferrier emerges from the shadows at the smugglers' meeting on the planet Trogon after everyone has spoken his or her piece. Convener Talon Karrde is sorry to see him invited. Thickly-built with an unkempt black beard and always chewing an unlit cigarra, Ferrier, from experience, warns that no one is safe when Grand Admiral Thrawn wants that person. This seems to convince the group not to take sides. Ferrier is accompanied by his wraith, Defel, shadowy black with red eyes and long white fangs, who initiates the defense when Imperial troops storm the meeting. After the smugglers escape the ambush, Ferrier is summoned before Thrawn to explain why he has bribed Lt. Reynol Kosk to ignore orders and besiege the smugglers. Thrawn allows Ferrier to live only if he implicates Karrde. When Karrde reveals Ferrier's duplicity to the other smugglers, Ferrier flees but is shot out of the sky by the smugglers.



Borsk Fey'lya

A New Republic Councilor from Botha, Fey'lya has maintained silence since Admiral Ackbar is vindicated of treason and embezzlement charges that Fey'lya brings against him. The Council needs Fey'lya's wisdom but he cannot bring himself to speak until the matter of cloning at Wayland arises. Not explaining why he sees that as a monumental threat to Botha and the galaxy, Fey'lya provides the bribe money to convince smuggler Talon Karrde to fly Princess Leia Organa Solo there to warn her husband and brother of unseen dangers.

Ghent

A brilliant "slicer" (computer hacker) in smuggler Talon Karrde's employ, Ghent is left on Coruscant during Mara Jade's recovery and busies himself on the New Republic computer systems.

Samuel Tomas Gillespie

Smuggler Talon Karrde's "slightly less than honorable" old friend, Gillespie flies Kern's Pride with an altered ID. He narrowly escapes the Imperial conquest of Ukio carrying proof that the Empire does not have a new secret weapon that penetrates planetary shields but is a trick. They meet near Chazwa and agree to summon fellow smugglers to a meeting at Whistler's Whirlpool on the planet Trogan. Gillespie insists there that they must oppose Grand Admiral Thrawn before he pulls the whole galaxy under the "Imperial shroud" again. Gillespie stands in with Karrde's co-pilot Aves for the second raid against Bilbringi and is willing to do anything for a price.

Talon Karrde

A highly successful smuggler, Karrde takes over much of Jabba the Hutt's organization after the latter's death prior to this novel, and brings the former "Emperor's Hand," Mara Jade, into his operation. Two months before this novel's action, Karrde is incarcerated aboard Grand Admiral Thrawn's flagship, and Mara convinces Luke Skywalker to help break him out. Karrde is first seen in this book trying to remain neutral in the fighting, but inclining towards the New Republic because of his fear of clones. He and Luke meet on Calius, where Luke on his own authority establishes a generous line of credit for information. Karrde delivers several key items, showing the New Republic how Thrawn's supposed super weapon works and documenting the number of asteroids orbiting Coruscant. Coming to pick up Mara, Karrde learns of the mission to Wayland and for a price takes Leia Organa Solo there and participates in the decisive battle.



Mazzic

A smuggler, Mazzic attends the meeting at Whistler's Whirlpool on the planet Trogan accompanied by a Gotal and a vacant-faced woman with plaited hair. Mazzic resents Talon Karrde's "New Republic recruitment speech," but after the Imperial raid, agrees to fight the Empire, but with Ellor intends to do more than just gather information. They raid the Imperial shipyards at Bilbringi, destroying a half-complete Star Destroyer, and get away. Grand Admiral Thrawn figures out who is to blame, has Mazzic brought to him in irons, and allows him to live only if he helps set up Karrde as hiring the Imperials. Mazzic presides at Karrde's "trial" and refuses to listen to any of his arguments until the real culprit, Niles Ferrier, slips up in his story. Mazzic goes on to take part in another raid on Bilbringi.

Mon Mothma

One of the three original founders of the Rebellion, Mon Mothma rises to unchallenged leadership after the destruction of Alderaan and General Garm Bel Iblis' departure to fight the Empire independently. As *The Last Command* begins, Mon Mothma has welcomed Bel Iblis back but sends him on an inspection of the outer sectors. She intends to put him in charge of tactical planning when he returns. Bel Iblis is present during the Empire's "hit-and-fade" attack on Coruscant and, in the absence of Admiral Ackbar, Mon Mothma must humble herself to ask Bel Iblis to command the defenses. During debates over Mara's jail break, aided and abetted by Luke Skywalker and Leia Organa Solo, whose advise Mon Mothma generally heeds, Mon Mothma insists that what they have done is irregular but for the good, but denies them back-up units, deeming the raid on Bilbringi too vital and too far along in the planning.

Par'tah

A Ho-Din with bouncing snakelike appendages on her head, Par'tah is sharp-tongued and cynical at the smugglers' meeting on Trogan, not caring what the Empire thinks about their activities and worries it could replace smugglers with clones. At the end of the failed meeting, Par'tah is the one most likely to consider joining Talon Karrde; after the Imperial ambush, she insists that the Empire must be taught a lesson. When Niles Ferrier sets Karrde up with false evidence, Par'tah is chosen to review it. She does so reluctantly.

Captain Pellaeon

The captain of Grand Admiral Thrawn's flagship, the Imperial Star Destroyer *Chimaera*, Pellaeon admires his superior - particularly his humanity vis-a-vis his predecessor Darth Vader-but disagrees with some command decisions. He does not understand Thrawn's insistence that artwork provides insight into an enemy's psychology and often misses the big picture. Pellaeon hates the Jedi Master Joruu C'baoth, whose talents Thrawn



needs at Ukio. C'baoth taunts Pellaeon by reading his mind and making him say the opposite of what he means. Whenever possible, Pellaeon stays inside a Force-void bubble created by a captured ysalamir. Pellaeon believes that Tangrene is the Rebel target for the climactic battle and complains that Thrawn is leaving it undefended. Thrawn assures him this is mere illusion and the bulk of the Rebel fleet is en route to Bilbringi. As the Imperial fleet is pounding the rebels, Thrawn's bodyguard, Rukh, slits Pellaeon's throat before stabbing Thrawn in the chest. Pellaeon struggles to give the order to retreat.

Han Solo

Princess Leia Organa's husband and her brother Luke Skywalker's best friend, Han is perhaps the most stereotyped of the characters, little developed since the Star Wars movies whose actions take place. He inevitably wears a "lopsided smile," ignores and mistreats Luke's droids, and recklessly jumps into action—literally, crossing stormtroopers' lines of fire. He continues to pilot the Millennium Falcon with co-pilot Chewbacca. He leads an expedition to Wayland to seek and destroy the cloning facility there, taking along Luke, Mara Jade, old friend Lando Calrissian, Chewie, and the droids. Annoyed that his Noghri bodyguards call him "Consort of the Lady Vader," Han settles for "Han clan Solo."

Darth Vader

Dead nearly six years dead when this novel opens, Vader remains a potent force, since he is the biological father of Luke Skywalker and Princess Leia Organa Solo. He is remembered as a brutal tyrant, sacrificing lives without qualm. Grand Admiral Thrawn, who assumes command of the faltering Empire after Vader and the Emperor die, prides himself on not being as profligate or brutal as Vader.

Winter

Leia Organa Solo's personal aide and, after Leia gives birth to her twins, their nurse as well, Winter is a tall, white-haired veteran of the civil wars. She and Leia grow up together on Alderaan, and when Leia enters politics, Winter follows her. During the war, Winter moves planet-to-planet in Supply and Procurement under many code names, the most famous being "Targeter," because her photographic memory helps Rebel raiders target attacks. Winter uses her talent to search—unsuccessfully—for the Empire's spy on Coruscant and receives "reliable" information about the coordinates of Wayland.



Objects/Places

Bilbringi

A system rich in minerals, Bilbringi hosts a vast Imperial shipyard. Smugglers infiltrating the vast shipyard witness suspicious activity connected with midsized asteroids, which it turns out are being cloaked (made invisible) for deployment around Coruscant, capital of the New Republic. Mazzic and Ellor destroy an unfinished Star Destroyer and fight off avenging TIE fighters. Later, learning that the Bilbringi Shipyards are equipped with a CGT array, the New Republic and the smugglers each independently seeks to capture it. Meanwhile, Grand Admiral Thrawn stakes out the shipyards to capture the Rebel fleet. As the battle turns against the Empire, with attacks on the Golan II Defense Platforms, Thrawn is forced to divert some warships, and is assassinated, forcing Captain Pellaeon to order a retreat. The war effectively ends.

Calius saj Leeloo

A spectacularly beautiful, former tourist attraction at the height of the Old Republic, Caliis saj Leeloo — "The City of Glowing Crystal of Berchest" — is a sad shadow of itself by the time Luke Skywalker explores it at the opening of this novel. Governor Staffa has an arrangement with the smuggler Talon Karrde, despite a huge Imperial bounty on his head, that lets Karrde walk the streets. He and Luke team up to obtain information about Imperial troop movements. Staffa watches this meeting and tells his dim-witted assistant Fingal to report to Grand Admiral Thrawn.

Chimaera

The Imperial Star Destroyer serving as flagship of Grand Admiral Thrawn, Chimaera is commanded by the cautious Captain Pellaeon. Many scenes in *The Last Command* are set aboard Chimaera, the name of a hybrid lion/goat/dragon in Greek mythology. Many occur on the bridge, set between two bays of crew members that keep her operating efficiently. The insane Jedi Master, Joruu C'baoth, at one point takes control of the minds of all crewmen on the starboard side, but Thrawn reminds him of the difficulties of keeping such control during an extended flight and knowing how to fight a battle. Other scenes are set in Thrawn's private quarters, where he enjoys studying artwork from the peoples he is conquering. He sees it as keys to their personalities and a means of understanding their flaws that might be utilized. This and current battle maps are available in holograph.

Coruscant

The capital of the Old Republic, taken over and refurbished by the late Emperor, and restored to the New Republic following his death—all occurring prior to this novel,



Coruscant is a hotbed of intrigue. A spy or spies, the so-called "Delta Source," is leaking information to the Empire. A team of Imperial commandos sneaks in, besieges Han and Leia Organa's suite trying to kidnap her and her newborn twins, but is beaten back; the team's leader fingers Mara Jade as an accomplice. She is jailed but has information that moves Luke Skywalker to break her out and fly with her to Wayland. Grand Admiral Thrawn puts an unknown number of cloaked asteroids into orbit above Coruscant, effectively closing it to all traffic. When advised they have gotten all the asteroids, the conservative rulers choose to keep the shields closed, but after a long and fruitless investigation, they learn that the ch'hala plants in the Grand Corridor have been wired to collect and transmit data to the Empire - a final legacy in the palace of the Emperor himself. That leak, at least, is plugged.

Honoghr and the Noghri

The home planet of the diminutive but fearsome Noghri, Honoghr has been laced with brown kholm grass, which is slowly killing off all other vegetation. Princess Leia Organa Solo has undertaken a successful mission to Honoghr prior to this novel to convince the Noghri to join the Rebellion and is highly venerated as "Lady Vader" and "Mal'ary'ush" (savior). When Leia's brother, Luke Skywalker, visits, he is received with reverence as Vader's son. When ten Noghri come to Coruscant to serve as Leia's bodyguard, Han resents being called "Consort of the Lady Vader." Six Noghri follow Luke, Han, and their companions to Wayland, quietly establish a defense perimeter and broker meetings with the natives. A Noghri named Rukh assassinates Grand Admiral Thrawn during the final battle between Empire and New Republic, and the Empire has to retreat. Rukh says it is revenge for the Empire having tricked and enslaved the Noghri.

Katana Fleet

A force of 180 Clone Wars-era Dreadnoughts, the Katana Fleet is referred to repeatedly in this novel, as it provides the backbone of Grand Admiral Thrawn's force currently harassing the New Republic. In the action, which takes place five months before this novel is set, Luke Skywalker and Mara Jade work together, even though she is determined at some point she will have to kill Luke. He rescues her from deep space and leaves her to convalesce at Coruscant.

The Millennium Falcon

Han Solo's modified freighter on which he earlier gains fame as a smuggler; the Falcon is co-piloted by the Wookiee, Chewbacca, and sometimes its ex-owner Lando Calrissian, it having changed hands both at the gambling table and during Han and Lando's service during the Rebellion. In this novel, Falcon is still seen in a state of continual disrepair but capable of remarkable feats of daring and warfare, despite its "ungainliness."



Poderis

A "marginal" windblown planet, colonized not because of rich resources or convenient location but because of the colonists' stubbornness. Poderis is part of the false trail that the Empire creates for the transshipment of clones. Luke nearly traps himself there by leaping atop a smooth-faced, angled windshield-barrier. He uses his lightsaber to cut a groove in the surface down which he slides and when out of sight cuts a hatch. Grand Admiral Thrawn orders him to be allowed to escape the surface but is frustrated when he fails to capture him in space.

Ukio and Woostri

The planets that Admiral Thrawn and Jedi Master C'baoth target to panic the New Republic into thinking the Empire has a new weapon that penetrates planetary shields, Ukio and Woostri both surrender swiftly. Ukio is a major loss to the New Republic, as it is a rich agricultural world that becomes a "supply depot for the Imperial war machine." It is exceedingly rare that a planet can be captured with defenses and shield intact. Smuggler Samuel Tomas Gillespee is retired on Ukio and escapes with evidence that the new weapon is an illusion.

Wayland and Mt. Tantiss

Home to the Psadan and the Myneyrshi species of humanoids, Wayland is a lush, uncharted world where the late Emperor has hidden his favorite memorabilia, including a vast cloning operation inside Mt. Tantiss, which rises from the forests on the western side of the planet's main continent. Grand Admiral Thrawn is using it to turn out new warriors against the New Republic, but Master Jedi Joruu C'baoth, also a native of Wayland, is also secretly cloning Dark Jedi there. Mara Jade, the former "Emperor's Hand" has visited Wayland once and is targeted for elimination by Thrawn, lest she tell others. She does, indeed, tell Leia Organa Solo the location and joins Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Lando Calrissian, and Chewbacca in going there to destroy the thousands of Spaarti cloning cylinders that produce clones in 15-20 days rather than the bare minimum of one year and the 3-5 years considered optimal.

Whistler's Whirlpool

A dilapidated "tapcafe" on the planet Trogan, Whistler's Whirlpool is the site for a secret meeting of smugglers: Talon Karrde, Samuel Tomas Gillespee, Dravis, Brasck, Par'tah, Ellor, Mazzic, Clyngunn, and Niles Ferrier. Karrde suggests that they unite against the Empire, but only Par'tah shows interest. As they are about to give up, Imperial forces explode through the wall in a raid, but the smugglers fight back and find themselves de facto united, Brasck excepted. A subsequent meeting on Chazwa is planned. It is later learned that Ferrier bribes the local Imperial commander to break orders and attack. Grand Admiral Thrawn spares Ferrier only if he sets up Karrde as the turncoat.

Ysalamiri

Natives of the mid-Rim planet Myrkr, ysalamiri create a Force-void bubble as a protection against natural predators, the vornskrs. Prior to *The Last Command*, Grand Admiral Thrawn removes some 5,000-6,000 ysalamiri (a species not described in this novel) attached to "nutrient frames" to prevent Master Jedi Joruu C'baoth from using the Force on him and creates a larger bubble on the planet Wayland and imprisons C'baoth there. Leia realizes that ysalamiri are the key to speeding up the development of clones. At the novel's climax, C'baoth kills all the ysalamiri with the flick of a switch and the Force is restored, allowing for a swashbuckling Jedi fight to the death.

Social Sensitivity

The three Star Wars movies, produced during the 1970s and 1980s, were enormously successful. A stirring epic of triumph over an evil empire, they combined superb special effects with story motifs drawn from various mythic sources. Despite their setting "long ago in a galaxy far, far away," the movies reflected several concerns of the era in which they were made. In the words of one fan, by 1976 we were two messy un-wars, one assassinated President and one crooked President away from any shining moments. Star Wars spoke to the decade's need to believe that real progress and even heroism were still possible. The movies also tapped into a growing disenchantment with conventional religion, by showing a hero who draws on spiritual resources not framed in traditional Western terms.

Timothy Zahn's trilogy was the first book series authorized to continue the Star Wars saga. Set some five years after *The Return of the Jedi*, the series assumes that the Emperor's death and the battle at Endor did not wholly destroy the Empire. Pockets of resistance remain. "Pockets" in an interstellar empire means entire planets and fleets. The men in charge of them are just as determined and wily as the former rulers of the Empire.

Thus "peace" has brought no real respite to Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, Leia Organa Solo, or the other leaders who are trying to build a New Republic out of a diverse group of allies and liberated nations. Zahn's trilogy speaks to the same hunger for heroism that inspired viewers of the Star Wars films, but it also reflects some social facts that came to the forefront in the 1980s and early 1990s. After an "evil empire" topples, there is still much mopping up to do, whether by military or other means. Also, among the most difficult problems for a democratic alliance to handle are the claims and prejudices of its various members. In *The Last Command* these are seen in the quarrels among generals and council members, and in the Mon Calamari paranoia about smugglers.

Leia and Han's twins are born early in *The Last Command*. Even before their birth, it is known they will have the potential for Jedi powers. In infancy, they are targeted for attempted kidnapping in a raid on the palace at Coruscant, now a Republic headquarters. The evil Jedi C'baoth seeks to use their talents in his own service. The babies' danger echoes the fears felt by most parents, writ large. Their birth also shows how life goes on and a new generation brings new hope, no matter how many troubles their parents and their world face.



Techniques

The Last Command, like the prior volumes, uses a semi-omniscient technique that cross-cuts rapidly between events happening in widely separated places. It is told in standard fictional prose style, with very few long paragraphs, descriptions of place or characters, and almost no inner monologue.

This pattern is reflective of the cinema approach to storytelling. Short paragraphs and many changes of scene increase the pace of the action. They also enable the writer to develop and juggle multiple plot lines. These provide increasing tension, because the reader can see them threatening to converge long before the fictional characters can.

Without some modification, though, this technique does not give the reader many visual cues. In motion pictures the visual element is primary. For characters or events that appeared in the films, the reader can use these images for his or her own mental picture. There is no problem in imagining Leia or Chewbacca or Lando doing what they are described as doing. The same is true of the space craft and battles which Zahn writes about very well. But with few visual cues or character tags given for the new, invented characters, it is easy to get them mixed up.

The biggest departure from the films comes in the novels' treatment of the Force. The movies showed it as a religious, or at least a metaphysical, concept. Like the Eastern yin and yang, its dark aspect is the other side of its benevolence. Both are a necessary part of the whole. Its power becomes accessible only after long training in spiritual disciplines. The novels, while not discarding these traits of the Force, treat it more like extrasensory power.

Zahn introduces ysalamiri, clinging ruglike creatures who block any manifestation of the Force in their immediate vicinity. "Magic sinks" or "telepathic dampers" appear elsewhere in science fiction and fantasy; they are used in societies where magic or telepathy function as alternate technology.

But if the Force is interwoven with the very nature of the universe (as the films suggest), it is hard to see how little fuzzy creatures could cancel it out. Nor does Zahn give many other indications that the Force has a larger meaning.

Whether this treatment stems from plot requirements or from a reluctance to deal with religion is not clear. In his original-universe fiction, Zahn has not hesitated to introduce religious topics.

However, writing for a mass audience and an already-established series may be a different matter. In any event, it is the one point at which a Star Wars viewer may pause and say, "Wait a minute! How can it work this way?"



Themes

Race

The Last Command shows a rather sharp—but not absolute—divide between the Empire and the New Republic over race prejudice, not among the racial strains within the species homo sapiens, but between homo sapiens and non-humans, including various hominids. The Rebel Alliance, now the "New Republic," has always been egalitarian. This is best seen in Admiral Ackbar, the fish-headed supreme commander of the Rebel forces, who is temporarily deposed not because of his race but because of unfounded allegations of fraud and treachery, notably filed by another non-human, Fey'lya. Wounded, Ackbar is restored to command when exonerated. It is important but underplayed that his counterpart commanding Imperial forces, Grand Admiral Thrawn, is not a homo sapien. The exception proves the rule.

The late Emperor and Darth Vader, both born homo sapiens, systematically enslave all races, creating all the animosity that colonialism on Earth engenders in subjects' hearts. They have destroyed the ecology on the planet Honoghr and turned the native Noghri into paid assassins, feared throughout the Empire. When Princess Leia Organa Solo gains the Noghri's confidence and convinces them that they have been deceived and betrayed, they organize for revenge, ultimately claiming Thrawn's life, and the decapitated Empire is driven into retreat. Likewise, on Wayland, the enslaved humanoids, the Psadan and Myneyrshi, mutual enemies, are united in their hatred of human colonists. Only when they see Chewbacca armed do they see that slavery is not practiced in the New Republic, so they allow the small band of fighters safe passage to attack the Empire. The Noghri have secretly followed the band to provide protection during the mission.

As Thrawn is an exception, so, too, is Han Solo. As a smuggler and then a military commander, whose best friend is Chewie, Han has constantly deal with non-humans, but he shows a distinct distaste for the Noghri. Many of the smugglers that Luke tries to recruit to the New Republic's side are non-human, and they seem to get along fine, each being motivated primarily by personal profit.

Power

The quest—if not the lust—for power pervades The Last Command. The New Republic purports idealistically to rule by example in sharp contradistinction to the Empire, which conquers and exploits. Within its hierarchy, however, tensions brood. The undisputed leader, Mon Mothma, is a holdover from the original triad that formed the Rebellion and is at best an enlightened despot. Her treatment of General Bel Iblis leaves him brooding like a child at a time his tactical genius is needed most, and Princess Leia Organa Solo despairs of their coming together for the common good. Both in the end rise above their pettiness.



On the Imperial side, the demented Master Jedi Joruu C'baoth, mocks his deceased predecessors, the Emperor and the Lord Darth Vader, for having too limited a view of power. They conquer, enslave, and exploit star systems and crush individual lives without hesitation, but are unable to seize control of minds and thus control destinies. When Luke Skywalker argues that a thousand generations of Jedi Knights have served the galaxy beneficently, C'baoth scoffs and notes only a handful remain. He intends not to serve but to be served.

His rival for power, Grand Admiral Thrawn, sees the mad fallacy in C'baoth's identification of himself with the Empire. Thrawn, a military genius widely viewed as infallible, is determined to re-build the Old Empire and hand it to C'baoth to rule. Thrawn's methods are repeatedly contrasted with Vader's. Thrawn does not readily waste lives or matériel or punitively punish subordinates. His aide, Captain Pellaeon, observes that this is the dawning of a New Empire. In the end, the two new entities maintain the status quo, fighting a massive military battle—a great exhibition of brute physical power—which ends abruptly when Thrawn's Noghri bodyguard plunges a knife into his heart as retribution for the Empire enslaving and deceiving his people.

Profit

The profit motive runs through *The Last Command* thanks to the handful of smugglers who ply their illegal trade in the galaxy without reference to the moral struggle of Empire versus New Republic. The current crop owe their prosperity to the downfall of Jabba the Hutt years before, following much infighting for territory. Princess Leia Organa Solo remembers that her husband Han once had the smuggler's "what's in it for me" attitude before he formally joins the Rebellion.

Many high officials in the New Republic look on smugglers with derision, even after Talon Karrde sells them invaluable information about secret Imperial weapons. They are incensed that Luke Skywalker, without authorization, opens an account to pay for intelligence. Mon Mothma agrees it is irregular, but the New Republic must treat anyone who is not an enemy as a friend. Karrde seems to justify the charge that smugglers are pure mercenaries when he demands a high price to fly Leia to Wayland to warn her husband, brother, and Karrde's close associate, Mara Jade, of unknown dangers there.

Karrde gathers the smugglers twice to discuss cooperating with the New Republic, and the consensus is that each must look after his or her own interests. They will continue to work for whomever offers the highest price. Opposing the Empire is dangerous because Grand Admiral Thrawn seems always to know every detail of what is happening everywhere and controls formidable, lethal forces. They know of the New Republic's disdain. Only when an Imperial squad raids their secret meeting do the smugglers rally to Karrde's call, but then only until lost profits cause them to wander off. Even Karrde's closest associate demands to be put on the payroll as he continues spying.

The climactic battle scene is set up when beleaguered Coruscant looks to steal one of three CGT arrays from Imperial territories. Karrde learns of this and plans to steal one



and sell it to them. He flies off on another mission; his associates find themselves trapped at the Bilbringi Shipyard, but quickly discover they are not the target, but the New Alliance fleet that has come to do the same thing (steal an array). Both escape obliteration when a Noghri bodyguard kills Thrawn as a personal matter and the Empire retreats. Afterwards, although the Empire has lost its ability to menace, Luke wants to keep open avenues between New Republic and smugglers and convinces Mara Jade to work as a trusted intermediary.

Significant Topics

This first book trilogy also continues most of the film trilogy's themes. There is a very strong, almost biblical theme of subjugation/liberation in the Star Wars movies. In Zahn's novels, most worlds of the Empire have been liberated from bondage (although some only shakily so). But the theme continues with peoples like the Noghri, whose planet's ecology has been destroyed by Empire forces, whose remnants still keep them enslaved.

Another theme of Star Wars is hidden identity. Who is Darth Vader? Who is Ben Kenobi? Who is Luke, and why did he grow up on an obscure desert planet? Who is Leia, and why was Alderaan destroyed? These questions are answered by the end of the trilogy, in a way that ties together factual and metaphysical mysteries. Hidden identity is less central to the novels, if only because the mysteries about the major characters have been solved. But it continues as a minor theme, with the character Mara Jade who formerly served as the Emperor's Voice, but remembers very little about those days except for her imprinted mission.

As a heroes' quest, Star Wars deals with questions of good vs. evil. These also appear in *The Last Command*. The evil nature of Imperial leaders is shown by their disregard for life, their use of clone warriors, and their oppression of various peoples. Luke has to face again the temptations offered by the dark side of the Force. After some smaller struggles in the prior books, this time he faces it literally, when he must fight his own clone, created by C'baoth.

The other side of the quest is the hero's inner growth. Although Luke grows in knowledge and understanding of the Force, the greater character development in this trilogy occurs to Han and Leia. Han earns his courtesy title of General as he discovers that leadership involves more than just being in the forefront of daring raids.

And Leia goes from her first stilted efforts at diplomacy to become a master coordinator and political strategist for the New Republic.



Style

Point of View

The Last Command is told in the third person past tense omniscient. Considerable use is made of present-tense conversation and italicized silent thought processes. Square brackets and double-square brackets are used to render alien dialog into English. The novel draws heavily on the rich mythology of the three original Star Wars films and novelizations by George Lucas. Author Timothy Zahn offers not even bare-bones characterizations of the iconic hold-overs Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa Solo, Han Solo, Chewbacca, Artoo, and Lando Calrissian, but uses their various catch phrases, gestures, and poses to paint pictures before the readers' eyes. Zahn is also continuing the saga begun in Heir to the Empire and Dark Force Rising, without providing any systematic summary of what has occurred there. This can be disconcerting, as the reader realizes that words or phrases or events have significance not immediately discernible. Most, but not all, are resolved by the end of the novel. Because the "Thrawn Trilogy" predates the Star Wars prequels, none of their mythology is present, which in some scenes such as the birth of Leia's twins now seems odd.

Except that he is vying for Imperial power and fighting the established good guys of the Star Wars movies, Grand Admiral Thrawn is presented as an exceptionally honorable and intelligent character, and the reader cannot help pulling for him. His aide and foil, Captain Pellaeon does not always agree with his daring tactics - including the fatal error leading to the climactic battle - but admires him as a person. Thrawn's New Republic opponents hold him in awe. Thrawn is contrasted with barbarous Darth Vader and made into the icon of a New Empire. The strict black/white dichotomy of the movies is preserved only in the person of the insane clone of Master Jedi Joruu C'baoth, who is out to acquire more power and manifest more evil than the late Emperor or Darth Vader. Notably, Thrawn and Pellaeon despise him, but in a re-staging of his climactic battle with the Dark Side at Endor, Luke Skywalker tries to redeem C'baoth.

Setting

The Last Command takes place almost six years after the Battle of Endor, during which both the Emperor and Darth Vader perish. It also takes place six months after the Imperial Grand Admiral Thrawn captures the lion's share of the Katana fleet of dreadnoughts, tipping the scales of warfare against the struggling New Republic. Thrawn hopes to throw a knock-out punch. The events between Endor and the present time - and indeed numerous highlights from the first three Star Wars films (and subsequent novelizations) are heavily alluded to.

The action begins aboard Thrawn's flagship, the Imperial Star Destroyer Chimaera. Many scenes take place on the bridge or in the admiral's dimly-lit private quarters, where he enjoys fine art as a window on perspective enemies' psyches. The Imperial



force easily conquers Ukio. The action then bounces planet-to-planet as Luke Skywalker tries to confirm the routes along which clones are being moved from the secret hatching facility to assignments in the Imperial fleet. The New Republic hopes to backtrack and assault the menacing facility. Luke makes contact with a wanted smuggler and sets up an account from which Talon Karrde can draw payment for information he comes upon. Karrde meets several times on several planets with "colleagues," who reluctantly go along. Luke, meanwhile pays a brief but fateful visit to Honoghr, whose ecology the Empire has destroyed. Several smugglers are summoned to Chimaera to face an angry but practical Thrawn.

The former Imperial Palace on Coruscant is the setting for many scenes in the novel, both depicting an invasion by Imperial commandos and devastating fire fight, the search for a spy or spies, the scrambling to mount effective defenses against Thrawn's "hit-and-fade" attack, its fearful hunt for cloaked (invisible) asteroids, and planning an attack on the Bilbringi Shipyards. The novel's climax is split between two simultaneous battles: a massive confrontation at Bilbringi and a smaller, more personal clash at Wayland. There Luke and Mara eliminate the last Dark Jedi C'boath and the "old team" of stalwarts from the movies fight off stormtroopers to destroy the cloning tanks. Thrawn is assassinated on his own bridge, and the New Republic emerges victorious

Language and Meaning

The Last Command is told through an impersonal narrator. As the final volume in a "Thrawn Trilogy," it draws heavily not only on the mythology of the original Star Wars films but also Heir to the Empire and Dark Force Rising. Author Timothy Zahn clearly assumes that readers have seen and imbibed the films, for he offers not even bare-bones characterizations of the hold-over celluloid characters, Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa Solo, Han Solo, Chewbacca, Artoo, Threepio, and Lando Calrissian, but uses their various catch phrases, gestures, and poses to bring up pictures before the readers' eyes. Anyone reading The Last Command without having read the preceding novels is at times at a loss as to what is going on because the references are terse and spread out throughout the novel. Without having seen the films, the reader is lost, as innumerable scenes are set up and/or evaluated by brief allusions to famous scenes.

The Last Command is filled with the odd names of solar systems, planets, cities, species, exotic gadgets, and colorful practices begun in the movies. Many times, situations require technical explanations, so that characters outside the military/industrial complex—including the reader—can understand the brilliance of what it is being done. These passages are generally confusing and unsatisfactory. Zahn is irregular in the amount and kind of detail he offers introducing new scenes. One gets a feeling for the Whistler's Whirlpool tapcafe on Trogan and all the detail plays a part in the climactic firefight. On other planets, much of the opening description is superfluous. The description of the vast cavern on Wayland that houses the Spaarti cloning tanks is perhaps the most carefully and precisely written, evoking Dante's Inferno—but also several famous movie scenes. Most of the dialog is derivative from the movies and predictable, but the roundhouses among smugglers is engaging. The Last Command



presents an engaging adventure story but does not burden the reader with deep meaning.

Structure

The third and final novel in Timothy Zahn's "Thrawn Trilogy," *The Last Command* consists of twenty-nine numbered but untitled chapters of varying lengths. Each chapter contains multiple scenes dealing with events taking place at the same time in several locations. In many cases, the results of some planning or action are shown and then the preparation for it explained within the same chapter. There are few segues; additional leading between paragraphs signals the shift. There are not marked differences in tone as the novel moves forward.

The threads that intertwine throughout the book include: 1) Imperial Grand Admiral Thrawn's dedication to and steady success in wiping out the remnants of the Rebellion that dares call itself the "New Republic"; 2) Jedi Master Joruus C'baoth's growing megalomania and determination to turn Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa Solo, her newborn twins, and Mara Jade into his apprentices, by and with whom he will rule the galaxy; 3) the New Republic's determination to hold out while maintaining its high moral standards; 4) the likelihood that new Clone Wars could be in the offing, since massive numbers are being turned out at reckless speed; 5) Mara Jade's implanted obsession with killing Luke; and 6) the determination of a group of smugglers to look out for their own economic interests, not getting drawn into the war, but fearing a renewal of the Clone Wars.

Two threads are constants: Thrawn and C'baoth being at odds with one another and Mara's nightmares. The other threads are twist and re-twisting. Many suggest danger approaching, but none points to real mystery; even how the asteroids will be used and how their being cleared will be known is given away early on. Captain Pellaeon provides a sounding board and mild voice of constraint for the confident and enigmatic Thrawn. The New Republic leadership try to project confidence and optimism, but are weary, overwrought, and hamstrung by self righteousness. Idealistic Luke agonizes about his shortcomings as a Jedi and wants to "save" C'baoth. Fortunately, cynical Mara is at his side and in the end brings fearsome C'baoth down.



Quotes

"Pellaeon frowned, an odd and uncomfortable thought suddenly striking him. Had C'baoth been able to guide the cruisers so well because each of their thousand-man crews were composed of variants on just twenty or so different minds? Or—even more disturbing—could part of the Jedi Master's split-second control have been due to the fact that C'baoth was himself a clone?

And either way, did that mean that the Mount Tantiss project was playing directly into C'baoth's hands in his bid for power? Perhaps. One more question he would have to bring to Thrawn's attention." Chapter 1, pgs. 13-14.

"'I understand your concerns,' Mon Mothma said, more gently. 'When we get the situation out there stabilized, I fully intend to bring General Bel Iblis back and put him in charge of tactical planning.'

If we get the situation stabilized, Leia amended silently, again feeling her stomach tighten. So far, the offensive was going uniformly the Empire's way—

The thought broke off in midstride, a sudden belated awareness folding in on her. No—it wasn't her stomach that was tightening...

Ackbar was speaking again. 'Excuse me,' Leia cut him off, getting carefully to her feet.

'I'm sorry to interrupt, but I need to get down to Medical.'

Mon Mothma's eyes widened. 'The twins?'

Leia nodded. 'I think they're on their way.'" Chapter 5, pg. 75.

"Bel Iblis nodded slowly; his lips compressed into a tight line, a hint of strain around his eyes. It was a look Mara had seen only rarely, and then only on the faces of the best military commanders: the expression of a leader preparing to send men to their deaths.

'We can't wait,' he said. The strain was still there, but his voice was firm. 'The group upstairs will have Solo's door open well before that. We'll just have to take them now.'

The guard commander took a deep breath. 'Understood, sir. Right, men, you heard the General. Let's find ourselves some cover and get to it.'

Mara took a step closer to Bel Iblis. 'They'll never do it in time,' she said quietly.

'I know that,' the other said tightly. 'But the more we can take out now, the fewer we'll have to deal with when the rest of them come downstairs.'

His gaze shifted again over her shoulder. 'When,' he added softly, 'they have hostages.'" Chapter 9, pg. 140.

"'Then I should like to hear your reasons,' Thrawn cut him off, swiveling his chair around at last to gaze up at the thief, 'why I should not order your immediate execution.'

Ferrier's mouth dropped open. 'What?' he said. 'But—I've gotten in with Karrde. He trusts me now—see? That was the whole idea. I can dig out the rest of his gang and deliver the whole bunch to you...' He trailed off, his throat bobbing as he swallowed.

'You were directly responsible for the deaths of four stormtroopers and thirty-two Chariot command speeders and their crews. I am not the Lord Darth Vader, Ferrier—I do not



spend my men recklessly. Nor do I take their deaths lightly.'

The color was starting to leave Ferrier's face. 'Sir—Admiral—I know that you've put a bounty on Karrde's whole group of almost—'

'But all that pales in comparison to the utter disaster you've created,' Thrawn cut him off again. 'Intelligence informed me of this meeting of smuggler chiefs almost four days ago. I knew the location, the timing, and the probable guest list ... and I had already given the Trogan garrison precise instructions—precise instructions, Ferrier—to leave it strictly alone.'" Chapter 10, pg. 166.

"'I control the Force,' C'baoth repeated angrily. But to Pellaeon's ear there was a hint of pleading in the tone. Like a child throwing a tantrum that he didn't really expect to get him anywhere...

'No,' Thrawn said, his voice abruptly soothing. Perhaps he, too, had picked up on C'baoth's tone. 'The galaxy is not yet ready for you to lead, Master C'baoth. Later, when order has been restored, I will present it to you to govern as you please. But the time is not yet.'

For a long moment C'baoth remained motionless, his mouth working half invisibly behind his flowing beard. Then, almost reluctantly, he lowered his arms; and as he did so, the bridge was filled with muffled gasps and groans and the scraping of boots on steel decking as the crewers were released from the Jedi Master's control. 'You will never present the Empire to me,' C'baoth told Thrawn. 'not of your own will.'

'That may depend on your ability to maintain that which I am in the process of re-creating,' Thrawn said.

'And which will not come to be at all without you?'

Thrawn cocked an eyebrow. 'You're the Jedi Master. As you gaze into the future, can you see a future Empire arising without me?'

'I see many possible futures,' C'baoth said. 'In not all of them do you survive.'" Chapter 12, pg. 202.

"Leia frowned, staring at the tree, as her chain of thought jolted to a halt. Another small burst of red appeared on the slender trunk as she watched, sending a pale red ring rippling outward and around the trunk until it faded into the quiet purple background turmoil. Another flicker followed, and another, and another, chasing each other around the trunk like ripples from a dripping water line. All of them more or less the same size; all of them originating from the same place on the trunk.

And each of them exactly in time with one of the clucking noises from the MN-2E droid.

And suddenly then it hit her, like a violent wave of icy water. Fumbling at her belt with suddenly trembling fingers, she keyed for the central operator. 'This is Councilor Organa Solo,' she identified herself. 'Get me Colonel Bremen in Security.

'Tell him I've found Delta Source.'" Chapter 17, pg. 286.

'Enough,' Mazzic cut him off. 'This isn't evidence, Karrde, and you know it. Anyway, what would Ferrier have to gain by setting up an attack like that?'

'Perhaps so he could be conspicuous in helping us fight it off,' Karrde suggested.



'Hoping it would soothe our suspicions about his relationship with the Empire.'
'Twist all the words you want,' Ferrier said, jabbing a finger at the data pad sitting on the table beside Mazzic. 'But that data card doesn't say I hired Kosk and his squad. It says you did. Personally, I think we've heard enough of this—'
'Just a minute,' Mazzic interrupted, turning to face him. 'how do you know what the data card says?'" Chapter 18, pgs. 302-303.

'Then perhaps the Bilgringi attack should be postponed,' Fey'lya said.
Leia turned to look at him, dimly aware that the whole table was doing likewise. It was practically the first time the Bothan had spoken at a Council meeting since his bid for power had ignominiously collapsed out at the Katana fleet. 'I'm afraid that's out of the question, Councilor Fey'lya,' Mon Mothma said. 'Aside from all the preparations that would have to be discarded, it's absolutely imperative that we clear out these cloaked asteroids hanging over our heads.'
'Why?' Fey'lya demanded, a rippling wave running through the fur of his neck and down his shoulders. 'The shield protects us. We have adequate supplies for many months. We have full communication with the rest of the New Republic. Is it merely the fear of looking weak and helpless?'
'Appearances and perceptions are important to the New Republic,' Mon Mothma reminded him. 'And properly so. The Empire rules by force and threat; we rule instead by inspiration and leadership. We cannot be perceived to be cowering here in fear of our lives.'" Chapter 20, pgs. 331-332.

'Is it about power, Master C'baoth?' Covell asked. This was a familiar topic, and even without the prompting in his mind he would have remembered his lines.
'It is indeed, General Covell,' C'baoth said gravely. 'I told him at the very beginning that true power didn't lie in the conquering of distant worlds. Or in battles and war and the crushing of faceless rebellions.'
He smiled, his eyes glittering brightly in Covell's mind. 'No, General Covell,' he said softly. 'This—this—is true power. Holding another's life in the palm of your hand. Having the power to choose his path, and his thoughts, and his feelings. To rule his life, and decree his death.' Slowly, theatrically, C'baoth held out his hand, palm upward. 'To command his soul.'
'Something not even the Emperor ever understood,' Covell reminded him." Chapter 21, pg. 351.

"They reached the top of the steps and headed across toward the throne itself, turned away from them toward the polished rock wall behind it. Mara was looking at it, wondering why the Emperor had left it facing away from his galaxy, when it began to turn around.
She grabbed Skywalker's arm, snapping her blaster up to point at the throne. The massive chair completed its turn—
'So at last you have come to me,' Joruss C'baoth said gravely, gazing out at them from



the depths of the throne. 'I knew you would. Together we will teach the galaxy what it means to serve the Jedi.'" Chapter 25, pg. 417.

"The clone must have heard her coming, of course; the distinctive sound of her lightsaber made that inevitable. But with Skywalker backed up against the wall, the temptation to finish off one opponent first was too great to resist. He swung one last time, his lightsaber slashing into the wall as Skywalker ducked low beneath the blade— And with a brilliant flash of shattered electronics, the wall exploded outward, over Skywalker's head and directly into the clone's face.

Skywalker hadn't been backing into a wall after all. He'd been backing into one of the throne room's view-screens.

The clone shrieked—the first sound Mara could remember hearing him make—as he staggered backward. He spun toward the sound of her lightsaber, his face twisted with anger and fear, his eyes still dazzled. He raised his lightsaber to attack—

YOU WILL KILL LUKE SKYWALKER.

She ducked beneath the slashing blade, gazing into his face. Skywalker's face. The face that had haunted her nightmares for nearly six years. The face the Emperor had ordered her to destroy.

YOU WILL KILL LUKE SKYWALKER.

And for the first time since she'd found Skywalker and his crippled X-wing floating in deep space, she let herself give in to the voice swirling through her mind. With all her strength, she swung her lightsaber and cut him down.

The clone crumpled, his lightsaber clattering to the floor beside him.

Mara gazed down at him ... and as she took a ragged breath, the voice in the back of her mind fell silent.

It was done. She had fulfilled the Emperor's last command.

And she was finally free." Chapter 27, pg. 446.

"Thrawn was sitting upright in his chair, his face strangely calm. In the middle of his chest, a dark red stain was spreading across the spotless white of his Grand Admiral's uniform. Glittering in the center of the stain was the tip of Rukh's assassin's knife. Thrawn caught his eye; and to Pellaeon's astonishment, the Grand Admiral smiled. 'But,' he whispered, 'it was so artistically done.'

The smile faded. The glow in his eyes did likewise ... and Thrawn, the last Grand Admiral, was gone." Chapter 28, pg. 463.

Adaptations

Creating the first authorized spinoffs from the Star Wars movies presented unique challenges to Zahn. The novels had to stay true to the spirit and the facts of the film series, build a new galaxy-wide conflict out of the ashes of the Old Empire, and appeal to a mass audience which probably loved the movies for diverse reasons. The Star Wars novels were also to be integrally linked, with events in one book or trilogy having consequences in others.

Thus the new characters and features Zahn introduced in the initial trilogy needed to have potential for further development by other authors.

In general Zahn carried out this tricky assignment extremely well. The stunning large-scale battle which concludes Heir to the Empire is drawn as visually and as suspensefully as the space battles which occur on screen.

Characters like Mara Jade and new discoveries like the Black Fleet, found in Dark Force Rising, have played major roles in subsequent trilogies.

The metaphysical aspects of the Force and Jedi powers are the only major motif of the films which Zahn appears to slight. So many other things are going on in these novels, however, that only a minority of readers are likely to miss this part.



Key Questions

Any discussion of *The Last Command* and the related books can draw on a large audience of Star Wars enthusiasts.

Some may be interested mostly in spectacular space battles and the special effects which create them. Some may be most fascinated by the characters and the alien worlds, and some may be drawn to the philosophical and metaphysical side of Star Wars. Leaders should be prepared to include all these aspects, at least briefly. Members of each such interest cluster are likely to contribute insights and knowledge aside from the usual literary comments.

1. Grand Admiral Thrawn is a better strategist and leader than any of the New Republic's generals. If circumstances had been different, could he have worked successfully for the other side? Or does his combination of talents require an authoritarian setting?
2. He is finally defeated, but largely because the smugglers misread the Republic's planted signals and decide to raid the Bilbringi shipyards themselves. Was Thrawn so focused on outwitting the New Republic that he forgot to allow for other enemies? Or was this just a case of serendipity?
3. Mara Jade was programmed by the Emperor to kill Luke Skywalker, an instruction that continued to haunt her after the Emperor's death. At the same time, as Han points out, she missed many opportunities to do so. Only when she kills Luke's clone in the showdown with C'baoth, does the programming vanish from her mind.

Would she eventually have killed Luke otherwise?
4. Could Luke have used the Force to remove the programming from her mind? If so, why did he not do it?
5. Ships coming out of hyperspace materialize where there was no sign of them before. In some cases this allows strategic surprise, as in the climactic raid on Bilbringi. Other times, it could mean disaster. Give some examples of different consequences, from science fiction or your own imagination.
6. There are several theories used in science fiction to allow for faster-thanlight travel. Explain how the hyperdrive or some other methods, might work. Do you believe such travel may actually be possible in the future, despite its seeming impossibility today?
7. At the beginning of the book, Leia says she felt an eerie afterimage when going through the area of space where the Death Star was destroyed. What does this imply about the Force?
8. Although there are many hints that Leia has as much potential for the Force as her brother, she never gets fully trained to use it. Raising her children and serving the New



Republic take up too much of her time and attention. Is this inevitable because of her roles as a mother and a princess?

Or has she made a conscious choice among priorities?

9. Luke, on the other hand, feels it is his responsibility to confront C'baoth, whose megalomania threatens all other Jedi. Han, Leia, Mara, and Lando all follow Luke to Wayland and his final showdown with C'baoth. Was it wrong to draw them all into it? After all, Thrawn also planned to eliminate the dark Jedi. Or were C'baoth's plans for the clones so dangerous that Luke had no other choice?

10. Han and Leia's twins are born as this novel opens. What challenges are they likely to face as they grow up?



Topics for Discussion

Author Timothy Zahn three times mentions a "last command." What are they and which do you think he has most in mind when naming this book?

What role does artwork play in the novel? Do you agree with Grand Admiral Thrawn that art reveals a civilization's psychology? Do you agree with Thrawn's opponents that some cultural expressions are too bizarre to be appreciated by non-natives? Can you offer examples from earth history?

How does Grand Admiral Thrawn differ from Darth Vader? In what ways is he the same? Could the New Republic make peace with such a man or is continuing warfare inevitable?

How does Councilor Fey'lya's breaking his long silence heighten the drama in the novel? What do the dynamics of that top-level meeting say about the New Republic leadership? How does it compare and/or contrast with Grand Admiral Thrawn's stubbornness?

How is C'baoth's megalomania revealed. Is the control of souls the ultimate use of power?

How do General Bel Iblis and Grand Admiral Thrawn regard one another? How does Admiral Ackbar stack up against them as a commander?

In a novel that has an obvious villain and a variety of colorful, less obvious characters, who would you nominate as the hero? If you find none, with whom do you most identify—and why would you not call her or him the hero?



Literary Precedents

Obviously Zahn's trilogy is closely related to the three Star Wars movies.

Lucasfilm commissioned Star Wars novels from several popular science fiction writers, apparently to build up interest in the mythos prior to the planned release of new Star Wars films near the end of the 1990s.

The Star Wars movies, in turn, took inspiration from a wide spectrum of sources. Among these were previous science fiction movies, including the German film *Metropolis* (the source of the droid Threepio's costume; 1926).

Lucas also drew on Asian mysticism, Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's quest, and the venerable science fiction tradition of a civilization peopled by multiple species. The first movie's opening scenes, on the desert planet Tatooine, are reminiscent of Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1966).

Zahn's trilogy also shows a debt to other epics about interstellar empires.

Asimov's *Foundation* series is perhaps the most famous of these.

Related Titles

The Last Command is the third book of a trilogy which also includes Heir to the Empire (1991) and Dark Force Rising (1992). The first book introduces the situation of Thrawn and C'baoth as surviving rival "heirs to the empire," which was believed to be vanquished in the Battle of Endor. It is a fast-paced book made up almost entirely of action sequences. Even a pregnant Leia Organa Solo makes a terrifying escape from the Wookies' lofty treehouse dwellings early in the book. In Dark Force Rising, Karrde and Jade are revealed to be open to dealings with New Republic forces. The novel ends with a battle in which Thrawn captures the lost Katanga fleet, giving him new resources for his struggle to revive the old empire.

Other Star Wars novels have followed Zahn's trilogy. In chronological order of their events, these are: The Truce at Bakura (1994) by Kathy Tyers and The Courtship of Princess Leia (1994) by Dave Wolverton, both of which take place after the movies' events but before those of Zahn's trilogy. Kevin J. Anderson's Jedi Academy trilogy, also published in 1994, consists of Jedi Search, Dark Apprentice, and Champions of the Force. It is a young adult series set four years after Zahn's books. Children of the Jedi (1995) by Barbara Hambly follows, one year later.

The Crystal Star (1995) by Vonda N. McIntyre, occurs a decade after the end of the film Return of the Jedi. Roger MacBride Allen's Corellian trilogy, Ambush at Corellia, Assault at Selonia, and Showdown at Centerpoint, all published in 1995, takes the characters to Han Solo's newly threatened home star system four years later.



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