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Bane of the Sith

by Kevin J. Anderson;

Illustration by Stan Shaw

sended by Andreas Lescano

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Like a thrown dagger seeking its target, the Valcyn stabbed through hyperspace, a lone survivor racing away from the site of the battlefield massacre.

All of the Sith Lords were dead after their last stand on Ruusan... all except one. The insidious "thought bomb" set off in a glorious suicidal gesture by Sith Lord Kaan had also obliterated all of the Jedi Knights under Lord Hoth's command. Every Force-user on Ruusan had been annihilated, warriors both light and dark. But there were other Jedi Knights abroad in the Republic - - and now the Brotherhood of Darkness was extinct. Except for Darth Bane.

"You are a coward," said a hollow spectral voice beside him, loud and hot in the closeness of the sleek ship's cockpit. "You have failed me and Lord Kaan and all your Sith brothers."

His knuckles white as he gripped the controls of the Valcyn, Darth Bane curled back his lips, showing clenched teeth. His eyes were wide and hunted as he navigated through the convolutions of hyperspace, fleeing toward what he hoped would be a refuge... and a new beginning.

Beside him, occupying no space inside the blade-shaped spacecraft, sat the avatar of Sith Lord Qordis, a man wrapped in shadows. He crackled with black dark side energy - - the evil residue of a dead man.

Qordis turned his long ghoulish face toward Bane. His eyes were embers of fire wreathed within inky hollows. The specter pointed an accusing talon-like finger at Darth Bane. Reflections of his remembered obsidian-encrusted rings glittered in the cabin light.

"No, Master Qordis," Bane said, a large man hunched in the cockpit. "I am not craven. I have done only what was required. Someone had to escape, so that the flames of dark lore would not be extinguished completely." His head was shaved smooth, his scalp blotched with discolorations. Bane's jaw was firm and square, his eyes as large as lanterns. His body was muscular enough to intimidate any foe, but the accusing spirit of his Sith Master made even the burly Sith Lord's resolve turn to cold water.

"You abandoned us, Darth Bane."

"No, I intended only to protect the legacy of the Sith! I must carry on the work of Darkness, or else all of our existence, the entire Brotherhood, will be forgotten." Trying to concentrate on his ship despite the looming presence beside him, Bane studied the coordinates. He worked the Valcyn's controls, and the ship plunged out of hyperspace, as if a surreal vacuum had broken around it. The slim spacecraft dropped into star-studded blackness, circling downward with its own momentum, augmented by powerful thrusters.

Darth Bane descended into the harsh, bright light of the Onderon sun. In this solar system, only one planet was habitable - - Onderon itself - - and it held a grouping of four erratic moons, including the beast moon of Dxun.

There, perhaps, he could redeem himself and mitigate this disaster.

Bane pressed his cold lips together, muttering quietly as he wrestled with his guilt. He

had told Lord Kaan the folly of his "thought bomb" plan, had disagreed with the tactics of such complete and destructive surrender. On the blasted and corpse-strewn battlefields of Ruusan, he had argued against the mass suicide of the Sith Brotherhood, even if it meant dealing such a blow to the Jedi Knights. A poor bargain, he had insisted, raising a gloved fist inside the war pavilions where the angry and wounded Dark Lords thought only of revenge against his comrades.

But, as they had done for so long, the Sith followers were more interested in their private squabbles, trying to step on each other's shoulders merely to gain status for themselves. Didn't they see what they were doing to their glorious dark dreams? Darth Bane had watched it happen. Even while the Brotherhood of Darkness faced total defeat at Ruusan, still they were more interested in personal glory than in uniting against the common enemy.

They had been vanquished for their folly. Bane was glad to be away from fools with too much power...

"Excuses and self-justification," said the ghostly avatar of the dead Lord Qordis, who had been annihilated on Ruusan, like all the others. "You were always a disappointment as a student, Bane. My other trainees followed orders, but you questioned too much. You refused to do what was necessary, and you never bothered to finish your training." Qordis seemed to grow larger, until the Valcyn's cockpit could no longer contain the angry spirit. "Now how will you complete your mission?"

"I always do what is necessary, for my survival and for the benefit of the Sith," Bane muttered. "But none of you would listen to me." The Valcyn plowed through interplanetary space, cutting its way toward Dxun, where Bane hoped to find a new future for the Sith. "Now you are all dead, and at last I have a chance to recreate the Sith in the proper way."

The leprous green moon hung directly within his navigational circle. Though squeezed and cracked by tidal stresses, Dxun was overgrown with a cancerous covering of wild life-forms, twisted jungles infested with predatory creatures more horrific than any Jedi Knight could ever imagine. Bane had heard of the moon's long dark side history and hoped to find a place of refuge here on Dxun.

When he looked beside him, he saw that the specter of Lord Qordis had vanished. He breathed a sigh of relief as he began descending into the beast moon's gravity well, wondering where he would ever find a safe landing place in the nightmare of foliage below. His relief came too soon. "You will not get away unpunished!" Qordis's words boomed into Bane's mind. Sparks flew like fire geysers from the Valcyn's control panel. The engines gasped as if they'd been strangled, then gave out with a disheartening thunk. The damaged craft rattled and shuddered as it dropped through the air like a wedge-shaped stone. All the ship's systems had gone completely dead.

Bane struggled to reignite his thrusters, attempting to squeeze just a little more energy from the repulsorlifts. The hull heated to a cherry red as the Valcyn tore through Dxun's atmosphere. Lightning crackled around him. Storm explosions hurled his ship from side to side.

"Curse you, Lord Qordis," he said in a dry throat.

As the treetops rushed up at him, he fought back his panic, cast away his helplessness, and used a desperate snatch of Sith powers. The dark side energies buoyed his failing craft just enough so that it crashed into the treetops with slightly less than lethal force.

Branches splintered. Leaves burst into flames from the friction of his passage. The Valcyn's hull tore open, shredded by the sharp boughs. Darth Bane shielded himself with all the Sith power he possessed, forming a cushion against the impact.

The Valcyn broke through the forest canopy and slammed into the soft, mucky ground. The careening spacecraft ripped a long furrow and uprooted trees and plants, setting them afire behind him.

When the ship finally came to rest, Darth Bane found himself intact, though the ship itself would require months to repair - - if he even had the capability at all. Weak, and yet revitalized by the very fact of his survival, Bane pried his way out of the damaged spacecraft. The smoking hull burned his fingers as he climbed free. He dropped to the uneven torn ground.

The lone survivor of the Sith carried a supply pack and his hook-handled lightsaber, nothing more. He stood with his hands on his hips, surveying the furious jungles of Dxun, and contemplated his next step. He would be here a while.

Lightning continued to roar overhead like shattering electric crystal. He stepped away from the crash site into slashing rain in the black of night. He didn't know where to go... other than away from the ruined Valcyn. The beast moon seemed to be crouching and ready to spring.

Igniting his lightsaber, he trudged into the jungles, using the throbbing blade as a machete against the fang-clawed vines that writhed at him. He sliced through a thicket, but the foliage only grew denser, more resistant. His nostrils flared with anger as he strode forward, hacking with each step.

"You cannot hide out there, Bane."

He turned to see the avatar of Lord Qordis towering over him, ethereal yet vengeful. Bane lashed out at his dead teacher. "A Sith does not hide." He struck furiously with the lightsaber again, clearing a large tree in a shower of sparks. "I feel no fear."

Behind him in the morass of undergrowth, a loud boom ripped through the jungle. A pillar of fire erupted, vaporizing more of the oily foliage. A shockwave from the exploding fuel cells and cracked engine core flattened the forest for a hundred meters around. Smoking shrapnel, hunks of metal hull plates hammered around Bane like a meteor shower. Now, nothing remained of his damaged ship but a smoldering crater sizzling in the cold rain.

Angry, Darth Bane turned to the smug dark side avatar. "I see you don't intend to make this easy for me."

"I intend to make it deadly for you." The evil spirit barked a harsh laugh, then dissolved into the jungle shadows.

Bane shored up his determination and pointedly refused to look back as he pushed into the wilderness of Dxun. He thrashed through the jungle, which never seemed to give him three steps without fighting back. The ground beneath his feet trembled from the moon's tidal instabilities. Ominous hunting noises filled the jungle, and Bane remained on his guard. He knew the dark and bloody history of this place and was aware of his own peril.

Eons ago, the beast moon of Dxun had shifted in its erratic orbit until it came dangerously close to the parent planet. During the first grazing encounters, the atmospheres of Dxun and Onderon touched and joined, allowing the hideous flying creatures of Dxun to travel across the bridge and fall upon the unsuspecting primitive people of Onderon. The beasts preyed upon the helpless humans, slaughtering them, until the survivors learned to protect themselves. The humans invented weapons, fortified their villages, and trained their fighters to kill the venomous beasts.

As the moon continued on its orbit, the atmospheres separated again. But once each year they touched, and more monsters could journey to the feeding grounds on Onderon. Centuries later, after the Onderon civilization had developed in response to the horrible stresses, the orbits finally shifted again, freeing Onderon from the deadly kiss of Dxun. But the cities remained fortified, the culture continued to be warlike, and some of the leaders had schooled themselves in the dark side.

The once-great Freedom Nadd had ruled here for a time, and the ancient nobles, King Ommin and Queen Amanoa, had also used Sith secrets to cement their rule. Ommin and Amanoa had been entombed beside Freedom Nadd here on the beast moon. Years later Exar Kun, the Dark Lord of the Sith who had first resurrected the Sith Brotherhood, also came to Dxun, raiding Nadd's ancient tomb in search of dark side secrets.

Darth Bane knew there must be more to gain from this tainted, sinister place...

Light as a feather, yet moving with an assassin's power and grace, a sleek feline creature dropped out of the gnarled branches above. The creature was a dynamo of muscles, claws, and fur.

Though he was astonished that the predator could creep up on him so easily, Bane's dark side senses tingled at the last moment. He dove aside, avoiding the lethal blow, but still the impact of the panther-like creature knocked him to the ground. Crashing through stiff

branches, Bane rolled away, bringing up his lightsaber.

The feline predator had steel-gray fur interleaved with tiny bronze scales that gave it a reptilian shimmer. Its claws swept the air in a fist of swords, but Bane danced backward, dodging the blow. The panther-thing leaped again, and this time its double tails thrashed, both of them smashing into a tree trunk with a sizzling impact.

Bane dodged again and saw that the panther's two tails were each tipped with a long, hooked stinger swollen with a bulbous end. Where the stingers had torn holes into the tree trunk, corrosive venom ate a blackened, smoldering hole through the bark and the heartwood.

Narrowing his eyes, Bane felt the dark side energy build around him. He clasped the handle of his lightsaber. The panther-creature bared its long fangs and yowled, but it did not back away as Bane slashed the energy blade back and forth.

Rain continued to sheet down in steaming sparks off of the blazing lightsaber. The panther-thing crouched on its haunches, its wiry muscles coiling. Bane could sense the beast's thoughts, knew when it was going to spring - - and as the monster lunged into the air like a torpedo of fur, scales, claws, and fangs, Bane struck with his lightsaber, sweeping the blade upward in a powerful arc. He eviscerated the monster, splitting it open between its twin poisonous tails and curving sideways so that the smoking blade came out of the panther-thing's powerful shoulder.

The squirming creature flopped to the ground, thrashing like two pieces of frying meat. Bane took a deep breath as he watched the light fade from the demon's eyes, saw its claws flex and twitch.

As in the crash of the Valcyn, once again he emerged without a scratch. He heaved a lungful of the sour-smelling jungle air, detecting the electric ozone from his lightsaber blade, the singed fur and bubbling flesh of the slaughtered monster.

Bane snarled a bestial cry of his own into the jungle shadows. "You brought that upon me!" He expected his teacher Qordis to appear again, laughing at him. But instead of the vengeful dark avatar, he saw the shadowy spirit of Sith Lord Kaan, the fallen leader of the Brotherhood of Darkness who had annihilated the Sith and the Jedi on Ruusan.

The Sith Lord's voice was resonant and powerful, as always, but calm. He bowed his shadowy head toward the slaughtered creature lying in the underbrush. "It is a predator. It can think only of hunger and blood. It doesn't care whether you are good or evil, Darth Bane. It simply wanted to feed." The avatar backed away. "Come."

Without brushing aside a leaf or a twig, the ominous spirit strode into the jungle, gesturing after him. But before Bane could follow, Lord Kaan had vanished into the darkness. Intent now, Darth Bane fought his way deeper into the wilderness, trying to trace Lord Kaan's path, but still not knowing where he intended to go, where the dark side would lead him. Resinous vines thrashed at him, but he shouldered them aside. Thorns clawed at his face, but he did not let the scratches or the blood inconvenience him. His lightsaber made the air smell of burnt sap and smoking green wood.

He called up his Sith abilities, letting his mind expand to encompass the festering evil, the brooding potential power available to him. Though under the tutelage of Lord Qordis, Bane had never finished his training. He had listened to other instructors, studied some of the ancient writings, but there was much about the dark side he had yet to learn.

Now, Bane had no choice but to teach himself, and he had the incentive to achieve Sith skills. He hoped Kaan's avatar would assist him, but even without its sinister aid, Bane would do everything possible to resurrect the Sith Brotherhood.

Disoriented in the dense undergrowth, he trudged for hours in the direction that the shimmering spirit of Lord Kaan had gone. He followed his instincts like a compass directing him toward the concentration of dark side energies, a powerful well-spring that had long lurked on Dxun.

When he did not see the avatars again, he wondered if the evil specters had abandoned him. He didn't think so. They were just waiting and watching, letting Darth Bane make the next move...

He hacked away at a dead black tree, its leafless branches drooping like clawed fingers, its bark covered with scabrous encrustations of fungus. When the broken tree toppled, Bane

stepped forward under the driving rain into a small opening where even the grass had turned brown and withered. A geometric structure stood there, a pyramid with uneven planes and incorrect angles, made of a dull metal like a giant block of armor.

Bane stopped, his mouth open. He sucked in a heavy breath of the moist, fetid air. He had heard of this place, knew it to be a focus of dark side power: the tomb of Freedon Nadd, a hidden structure meant to hold the evil energies that had infected the bodies of legendary dark Force-users. The pyramid was a reliquary of lost artifacts and information that would recall the lost wonders of the Sith. It was a chance for the Brotherhood of Darkness to start again - - under his own terms. Now things would change under his stern vision.

Feeling energy tingle in his every step, Bane crept into the clearing. His lightsaber hummed and crackled as if eager to draw him forward. His skin felt electrified with the power of this place. The ruined, overgrown tomb of Freedon Nadd seemed to attract the lightning and the rain. Bane stood in front of the structure, looking up at the sheer metal sides, at the stained and corroded walls of Mandalorian iron. The lost crypt had been breached thousands of years before, broken open by some other plunderer - - Exar Kun, perhaps - - and left exposed to the vicious elements on Dxun.

Crouched inside the overhanging shelter of the broken doorway, he rested, exhausted from his ordeal - - first the flight from Ruusan, then the crash-landing on Dxun, and now the long and difficult trek through the jungle. He used a glimmer of his Sith power to summon fire and built a blaze from dead wood. The harsh orange and yellow light flickered and fought against the gloom.

Bane drew strength from the shadows around him. He seemed to hear whispering voices, a potential ready to explode here in the tomb. And yet he took comfort. "Here I will find my heritage. The evil in this place is resounding."

Outside in the clearing, the rain droplets sheeted through the shadowy image of Lord Kaan as if he wasn't there. "The evil is in you, Darth Bane - - as it should be. If you went to the shining towers of Cinnagar, or the plush chambers of Coruscant, or the rich savannas of Thule, the evil would still be within you."

Bane listened and smiled.

Kaan continued, "You are a seed. Will you let the Sith Brotherhood grow... or wither?"

Revitalized, he ignited his lightsaber again. Using it as a torch, he passed into the tomb of Freedon Nadd, ready to explore. The dripping passages around him were made of thick stone walls, slimed with green moss. The floor was covered with a film of decayed leaves and vegetation that had blown in over the centuries. Brittle bones of rodents and the crisp shells of dead insects were strewn in the corners. Though he saw many signs of death, he noticed no scuttling spiders, no living creatures at all. It was as if the tomb of Freedon Nadd had swallowed all the lifeforce, holding it like a battery.

He encountered blind chambers and sealed rooms, three broken sarcophagi where tomb robbers had stolen bodies or jewels, though Bane suspected that any thief foolish enough to raid a Sith crypt had probably died a horrible death not long afterward...

At corners in the winding passages, the ethereal specter of Lord Kaan led him onward, guiding him through the labyrinth. Bane did not question his former leader; he simply followed as anticipation swelled within him.

At last, Kaan stood outside a small chamber, his eyes blazing with dreadful fire. The alcove walls seemed wet and reflective. On the floor, as if someone had carelessly tossed it there, lay a jagged pyramid with starlike protrusions and sinuous hieroglyphics.

Bane pushed his lightsaber through the doorway so that the crackling glow of the energy blade illuminated the stone-walled room. "Is that a Sith holocron?" He looked in amazement at the shade of Lord Kaan.

"That object contains all the answers you desire, all the training and instruction you will need to master the secrets of the Sith. A wealth of information."

"It is all the wealth I need," Bane said, his voice no more than a cold breath.

By the shimmering light of his weapon, he saw that the air inside the chamber was threaded with strands of silvery, sticky webs. Rounded encrustations like armored barnacles plated

the low ceiling. The alcove had a claustrophobic and brooding aura, and Bane hesitated.

"In there, you must take the holocron," Kaan's booming voice insisted.

Pushing aside his doubts, Darth Bane entered the chamber, knocking aside the gossamer webs. He stood looking down at the vital holocron, awed.

Above him, he heard a wet movement, a slurping sound, and looked up to see the rounded encrustations shifting about as if wakened by his presence. Gelid strands drooled down like thin droplets of saliva. He ducked as one of the barnacle-things released its grip on the ceiling and dropped onto him.

He knocked the hard shell aside, then slapped at another sailing barnacle with his lightsaber. Amazingly, though it ricocheted away, the encrustation was not destroyed by the energy blade.

The barnacle-things began to rain down from the ceiling in greater numbers. One struck him on the left shoulder blade, and instantly the shell fastened itself to his flesh, as if it were a gigantic sucker. It acid-burned through the fabric of Bane's thick garment and sealed itself to the meat of his back.

The agony was indescribable.

He screamed and thrashed, trying to claw the encrustation from his shoulder. He arched his back and looked up just in time to see a larger object fall to the center of his chest, instantly fastening there with an unbelievable grip.

Bane shouted with the pain and wrenched at it, but the barnacle-creature had already eaten through his chest and seared into his pectorals, welding itself to his breastbone. He pulled and tugged, but the parasite stuck tight.

The remaining creatures burbled and moved about on the ceiling, anticipating. Still holding his lightsaber in one hand, Bane yanked out the black-bladed dagger from his waist. The razor-sharp knife glinted in the sickly light of the tomb chamber. He stabbed at the barnacle-creature, but the blade bounced off the parasite's shell, making no mark. Gritting his teeth, Bane slashed at his own skin to peel away his flesh from the edges of the thick, living encrustation. Dark blood welled up, and he cut deeper, digging with the knife's black tip to pry the creature off.

To his astonishment, though, as he made the incision, Bane watched the wound seal itself together, healing within moments. The pain remained, a stinging, throbbing sensation through his nerves.

"You led me here!" he shouted, looking for the avatar of Lord Kaan. "You lured me into this chamber." He used his fist and the blunt hilt of his dagger to pound the armored creature, but he felt somewhat stronger now, rejuvenated - - and betrayed. "What are these things?"

Now Lord Qordis appeared within the tomb, his black avatar rippling beside the shadow of Kaan. "They are called orbalisks," Qordis said, his face twisting into a smirk. "In time, you will come to realize the advantages of such symbiotes."

Lord Kaan spoke, his voice like iron, unsympathetic. "They are a small price, Bane - - are you willing to pay nothing to achieve your destiny?"

On the ceiling of the alcove, the orbalisks continued to simmer and move, but they left him alone now that he was infested. Fire burned through his skin from his chest and his shoulder where the parasitic barnacles increased their hold on his body, digging deeper, securing themselves.

Darth Bane clenched his teeth and sneered at the specters of Kaan and Qordis. In their dark eyes he found the strength to suppress the pain. He picked up the Sith holocron. The ancient relic waited for him, calling out evil promises. There were no longer any obstacles in his way.

He switched off his lightsaber blade, realizing that he could see and sense everything in the chamber. He knelt on the cold, slimy floor, ignoring the orbalisks above and everything else on Dxun. He hunched over the holocron and held it in his hands amid the dripping opalescent webs.

He activated the holocron and felt as if he were falling into an unending pit of wonders, information... and opportunities. He sat all alone, lost in the amazing library of darkness...

Entranced and inspired by the knowledge he drank from the Sith holocron, Darth Bane paid no heed to the time that passed while he huddled in the dank chamber of Freedon Nadd's tomb.

Later, much later, he emerged, his body stiff and sore, his mind aching and overfilled with secrets. He made his way back through the narrow, claustrophobic passages of the crypt and stepped out into the rank air of the beast moon.

The storm had passed, and the ground had dried. Many days must have gone by, but Bane felt neither weak nor hungry. He blinked. Even in the smoky, hazy light of Dxun, he had to hood his vision. He grasped the cold iron wall of the tomb to steady himself. Looking down at his chest, he saw that the puckered, scaly orbalisk had begun to bud, spreading out around the fringes in a larger area across his chest. No doubt the other one was also spreading on his back. Eventually, they would probably cover his body. Though the barnacle-like creatures were feeding on him, growing to cover more of his skin surface, the parasites were also pumping him with adrenaline and strength. This was a symbiotic relationship based on dark side energies, and now - - after he had absorbed the knowledge within the Sith holocron - - Darth Bane knew there would be enough dark side power for them all.

He stepped into the jungle clearing, away from the shadow of the ancient crypt. Bane thought of all he had learned and recalled the epic defeat of the Sith Lords at the Battle of Ruusan. No one had listened to him. The other Sith Brothers had fought among themselves rather than planning a strategic victory over their true foes. Bane realized the fundamental flaw in the old Brotherhood of Darkness. Now that he alone remained, now that he was the seed that would cause the new tree of evil to flourish, he decided that no longer would the Sith be composed of great armies attempting to overwhelm civilization through brute force. He had had enough of Lord Qordis's chest-pounding bravado or Lord Kaan's "rule by the strong." Such overt militarism against the Jedi Knights had failed miserably at Ruusan.

From now on, the Sith would depend on secrecy, working behind the scenes to eat away at the foundation of the Republic's government. With the Sith nearly extinct, weakened to the point of ineffectuality, Bane decided that the study of dark lore must go underground. He would hide and work in the shadows of society, using all he had learned from the holocron.

For now, he would also establish an unbreakable new rule to prevent the internecine feuds and civil wars that had stolen victory from the Sith grasp. There must be only two Sith at any one time: a master and apprentice. The two of them would learn the dark side intimately, and they would become brilliant puppeteers to manipulate the fools in the Republic.

But he was stranded here on Dxun. The giant planet Onderon rode high in the sky across the gulf of space, close yet impossibly far. The avatar of Lord Qordis had destroyed his ship, and now Bane was all alone, probably the only living human on the beast moon.

Standing in the clearing, collecting his thoughts, Bane heard a shriek in the sky. A gigantic winged form swooped down from the smear of dark clouds, spotting him with the razor eye of a raptor sighting in on fresh prey.

Bane instinctively grabbed his lightsaber, snugged the hooked handle against his wrist, and powered on the blade. The pterodactyl-like creature dove, its thin olive skin stretched taut along a bony framework, making its wings like jagged kites. The beast had a smashed-in face and a mouth full of protruding fangs. The black eyes were tiny and close-set, and the maw opened wide as its long, triangular wings flapped and maneuvered.

Bane slashed with his lightsaber, but the flying creature raked sideways with its dangling talons, huge arced scythes at the ends of its feet. The claws scored across Darth Bane's chest, a move that would have torn any other victim to shreds. Though Bane was sent sprawling to the ground, the clustered orbalisks gave him enough strength and armor so that the flying monster caused him no harm.

Feeling invincible, Bane stood, brushing the shreds of his uniform away, feeling the hard plate of the orbalisks. He squared his shoulders and held his lightsaber as the beast circled in for the kill. At first, Bane considered slaying the monster, smashing it to a

pulp with his newfound Sith powers - - but instead, he summoned his skills and stopped the beast in the air, driving it to the ground.

It flapped its wings, extending hooked claws, grasping and thrashing with its taloned feet. But Bane dominated the monster, forcing it to the still-damp ground. He continued to exert dark side pressure, and finally, with a grunt and an explosion of foul-smelling breath, the flying beast submitted. It bent its knobby knees and bowed its long neck down in front of Freedom Nadd's tomb.

Bane studied the creature for a moment. Then, like the fabled ancient beast-riders of Onderon, he climbed onto the flying monster's back, ready to ride off. This was a good omen, a sign for his future, and Darth Bane smiled.

He yanked at the flying beast's neck, and it flapped its leathery wings, raising him into the heavy air. It spat and thrashed, but finally relented to the presence of the Sith Lord on its back. Bane rode his new mount.

Now that he understood the depths of Sith powers, he thought he might even have control over worlds and moons, able to play with orbits and gravity like a child might play with colored balls.

Long ago, Dxun had grazed the planet Onderon, close enough that it was possible for creatures to pass across the conjoined atmosphere. Perhaps Bane could nudge the beast moon close enough so that he could travel to the nearby planet that filled the sky. In bloodshed and chaos, Darth Bane would go to Onderon... and there he would find his apprentice.