

American Jedi

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The crowd mills around the intersection where the multiple lightning strikes had occurred. A man crouches next to the shallow, three-foot-wide depression of shattered pavement and tentatively touches it. Picking up a piece of asphalt he tosses it from one hand to another before dropping it. He stands, blowing on his fingers.

“Is it hot?” another man asks.

“No, it's freezing,” the first man exclaims as he flexes his fingers. He has seen the aftermath of a lightning strike and it was nothing like this.

A low groan comes from below the surface, followed by a rumble. Everyone stares at the ground. Another low groan comes from below, followed by a much stronger rumbling. The pavement shakes as cracks spread out from the small depression, quickly reaching the surrounding buildings and spreading up their sides.

A young man appears from an alley a few blocks up the street and trots toward the intersection. Though the air is cold the man just wears athletic shoes, jeans, and a strange looking, long-sleeved shirt that seems to reflect the early morning sunlight.

The young man stops next to a police officer who had just arrived to take charge of the scene.

“Excuse me, officer.”

The officer turns to look at the young man. He notices a strange, button-covered device strapped to the young man's left forearm and the military-looking harness holding a small pack securely to his back. The officer glances down to see what looks like a large flashlight with several large buttons and a pistol straight out of a 1950s science-fiction movie attached to his belt. He wonders where this nut came from.

“Yeah?”

“You've got to get these people out of here!”

“Really? Why?” the officer asks.

“Something bad is about to happen.” He notices the lack of concern on the officer's face. “You saw the lightning strike the ground, right?”

“Yeah, what of it? There was a storm. There was lightning. Normally happens when there's a storm like this.”

The young man shakes his head. “No, Sir. That wasn't a storm. It was an electromagnetic wave front. It deposited something there, or rather down there, below the surface.”

“Oh yeah?” The cop notices the shimmering material of the shirt. “Look, uh, Captain Kirk, don't worry, we can handle whatever is there.”

“The name's Jeff. Look, you don't....”

The ground shudders and shakes violently.

The officer exclaims, “what the hell was that?”

“That's what I'm trying to tell you. You've got to get these people out of here before it's”

The ground shudders again. Yells and screams come from the crowd as the pavement begins to break apart, knocking people to the ground and tossing vehicles into the air. The air fills with a cacophony of car alarms and then the sounds of breaking glass as nearby store front windows shatter.

A few people run past the officer and the young man. However, for some incomprehensible reason, most of the bystanders remain in the street even as the pavement crumbles around them. A large circle in the middle of the intersection suddenly heaves ten feet into the air, pauses for a moment, then drops in an explosion of dust and dirt.

Jeff shakes his head in disbelief at the people milling around the periphery of the intersection, too mindbogglingly stupid to move to safety.

“Stupid cattle, waiting to be led to the slaughter.”

He turns to the officer to warn him again but before he can say anything he notices the officer's eyes open wide. Turning around he watches as a long and sinuous metallic arm several feet thick extends from the hole. The narrow 'hand' at the end of the arm, with three fingers each a dozen feet long, reaches up to the sky and then slams down onto the ground, crushing a car. Two more hands rise up and then slam to the ground.

Someone yells. A section of the pavement slowly rises out of the hole. Shattered pavement and dirt slough from the top of a large metallic object. As the device rises out of the hole and into the air people stop running to watch in amazement.

The triangular shaped metallic object, almost as large as a school bus, rises until it towers over the surrounding two-story buildings. The triangular 'head' rests on a thick, v-shaped neck. The three legs come together at a thick circular platform connected to the bottom of the neck. A few more people in the crowd believe that discretion is the better part of valor and begin to run.

Jeff grabs the officer. “You have to get these people out of here,” he yells. He shakes the cop out of his stupor. “Do you understand? Get them out of here, NOW!”

The officer nods, realizing that the young man may be right. He yells at the crowd, ordering them off the street.

Jeff walks toward the machine, forcing his way through the crowd. He keeps looking back up the street and muttering, “where the hell is he?”

The machine's head slowly turns from side to side, watching the quickly thinning crowd. The three bright lights at the front of the machine, one large, the ones on either side much smaller, illuminate the fleeing crowd. Nine thinner and much shorter metallic arms extend from different sections of the neck and begin to wave hypnotically through the air.

The machine takes a step forward. Though the thick dust obscures the machine's feet it cannot muffle the heavy thuds. Two small metallic arms unfold from the underside of the head. The end of each arm ends in a short blade-like device. Each blade begins to emit a bluish glow as they point toward the thinning crowd.

Jeff waves his arms. "Hey, over here."

The head turns to face him, the trio of lights shining on him like spotlights on a stage. He touches several buttons on his forearm device. "Yeah, that's right. Look at me. Ignore the idiots in the crowd."

One of the men standing nearby, a somewhat portly gentleman with his baseball cap on backwards, takes exception to being called an idiot. He struts toward Jeff as Jeff moves his forearm in front of his body.

Jeff whispers, "that's right, come to pappa you fricking mah-roon."

"Who you calling an idiot, jackass?" The man flexes his hands, ready to pound this strangely dressed nerd.

Without turning Jeff says in a low voice, "If I were you, dum dum, I would duck about" The left hand blade's glow becomes even brighter. "Now!"

There is a brilliant flash as a pulse of energy flies toward the two men.

"Jesus!!" the portly man screams as the flash engulfs the man standing in front of him. An oven-like blast of wind buffets him, knocking his baseball cap off and singeing the remaining hairs on his balding head.

Jeff stands there unharmed. Without taking his eyes off the machine Jeff yells at the man and the others standing like deer in the headlights. "Run you fricking morons, RUN!"

Ignoring the fleeing crowd the machine fires both weapons at Jeff. The resulting flash engulfs him. The pavement immediately in front of and to the sides of Jeff smokes and bubbles. Anyone still there might be able see a slight shimmer in front of the man, the only evidence of the defensive shield protecting him.

Jeff presses another button on his forearm device. "David, where the hell are you?"

A voice emanates from his forearm device. "Sorry, got delayed. I'm coming up behind you."

He turns to see a slightly older man, wearing dark navy pin-striped pants but otherwise identically equipped, jogging toward him. David stops beside Jeff.

Jeff gives him a questioning look. "Pin-stripes? A little formal for an alien invasion don't you think?"

"Had a session meeting at church when I got the notice." David jerks his head toward the machine. "Not sure how I'm going to explain this to the wife."

As David touches buttons on his forearm device he asks, "What's the sitrep?"

Jeff rolls his eyes. "The 'sit rep' is I have one medium attack walker trying to vaporize me. And how're things going with you?"

"Much better, thank you for asking. What's the plan?"

"How about you take the high road and distract it," Jeff nods toward the buildings. "I'll try the direct approach."

"Works for me."

David crosses the road toward a building with a sturdy awning over its main entrance. With a short running start David jumps up and onto the awning, a good twelve feet above the street. He quickly climbs up the side of the building and disappears onto the roof.

Jeff calls out. "You had to use the awning?"

David yells out a response. "Just pacing myself, thank you very little."

As the two men approach the machine it begins firing. A loud buzz fills the air as their shields disperse the energy blasts. The force of the blasts and the shattered pavement slows Jeff's advance. David notices Jeff's difficulty and fires his pistol. A bright flash three feet in front of the machine shows that its energy shield has easily absorbed the shot.

David fires several more times. While none of the shots reach the machine the flashes do temporarily blind its sensors. Taking advantage of the diversion Jeff runs toward the machine, pulling a strange-looking pistol from his backpack as he does. Strange because it has a tennis ball-sized sphere where the end of the barrel should be. He aims at the underside of the machine and fires. Half of the sphere, surrounded by a faint glow, flies toward the machine, trailing an almost invisible wire. The glowing sphere somehow neutralizes the machine's defensive shield, allowing it to slip through and attaching itself to the bottom of the machine's head near its left edge. Jeff removes the other half of the sphere and attaches it to the harness on his chest. Dropping the pistol he pushes a large green button on the sphere half attached to his chest. There is a whirring sound as the device reels in the wire, jerking him up and toward the underside of the machine.

Both blasters shift to face David, showering him with blasts of energy. As he moves his forearm to better shield his body he turns up the power to keep the blasts from frying him. David jumps back as the roof in front of him melts and then bursts into flame.

Unable to break past his shield the machine shifts its fire, blasting the building beneath his feet. David leaps backward, landing twenty feet away as the roof where he once stood collapses. He fires several more shots as the blasters shift their fire. He knows he can't cause any damage but hopes to distract the machine long enough for Jeff to do what he needs to do.

Jeff stops his ascent a dozen feet below the head. Using his body weight he begins to swing back and forth. His swing increases until he is able to grab the left side blaster arm. He wraps his left arm and then his legs tightly around the waving arm. As he rides the arm like a bucking bronco he slips his right hand through the loop on the end of his flashlight and pulls it from his belt. Pointing the end away from him he presses a button. A brilliant cherry glow appears as the tip of the 'flashlight' extends three feet. Jeff feels the heat radiating from the fully operational light saber. Tightening his grip he raises the saber into the air and slams it down onto the metallic arm.

Sparks fly as the saber cuts through the arm's shielding. Blobs of molten metal spew from the arm and fall to the ground. Jeff, carefully avoiding the splattering metal, raises the saber again and slices further into the arm. More sparks fly as he cuts into the mechanism below the protective armor. A much larger shower of sparks fly from the arm as the blaster's firing suddenly ceases. Super-heated steam billows into the air as liquid flows from ruptured lines in the arm and over the business end of the light saber. One more time he raises the saber and slams it into the arm. This time he slices through the arm, causing it to crash to the ground.

"Oooo, who's your daddy now?" he yells as he hangs the deactivated saber on his belt.

He lets go of the blaster arm and swings back under the machine. He pushes the button on the device to raise him close enough to grab the edge of the machine. He quickly scrambles to the top of the machine. Once there he glances toward the buildings in time to see David jumping from another collapsing rooftop. Jeff takes his Sci-Fi looking pistol from his belt and fires several blasts at a shield emitter on the forward edge of the machine. The emitter shatters, leaving the front of the machine unprotected and vulnerable.

He hears a warning from David. "HEADS UP!"

Jeff spins around to see the head and upper torso of a very ugly alien sticking out of an open hatch. The three malevolent eyes of the alien burn into Jeff's as the alien aims a rather large weapon at him. Jeff jerks his shield in front of his body and tries to aim his pistol at the alien. They fire at the same time. Jeff feels something slam into his chest, almost knocking him off his feet. His shot strikes the edge of the hatch, showering the alien with sparks and molten metal. The alien screeches and disappears into the machine, slamming the hatch shut behind it. Jeff quickly forgets about being hit.

Taking a deep breath and making sure his harness is on tight he steps over the edge. He falls until the wire stops his descent and swings him under the machine. His momentum causes him to slam into the machine's neck with an "oooff!"

He pushes the button on the device so he can move closer to the machine's underbelly. Nothing happens. Looking down he sees that the alien's shot had smashed the device. Though that saved him from injury he can no longer use the winch. He scrambles up the machine's neck until he reaches the underside. Flashes at the front of the machine show him that David has resumed firing, not only blinding the sensors but also causing some damage.

Jeff grabs his saber and makes a few adjustments. This time a white hot glow appears but extends for only a foot. The unbearable heat coming from the saber forces him to turn his head. Fortunately his shirt's material reflects the heat from his arm. He stabs upward, driving the glowing end into the bottom of the machine. A loud sizzling sound assaults his ears as sparks and drops of molten metal fall to the ground. The saber slowly inches in. Focused on trying to create a deep enough hole in the underbelly he doesn't see the row of buildings behind him collapse.

Finally satisfied with the depth he turns the saber off and returns it to his belt. Taking a foot long, cone-shaped device from his backpack he turns a dial on the bottom, presses a button, and then sticks the pointed end into the hole. He hears 'snicks' as little arms from the device extend to hold it in place.

Jeff lets go and swings away from the machine. He pulls his saber from the belt and takes a deep breath. With a lightening quick move he turns on the saber just long enough to slice through the wire. As he falls toward the debris strewn ground he slaps the saber onto his belt and pulls in his legs and arms to form a ball. He taps two buttons on his forearm device, causing a shimmer to surround him just before he strikes the ground. He bounces once and then rolls up the street. The shimmer disappears as his stasis generator deactivates. Looking up he sees the remaining blaster pointed directly at him. Cursing he scrambles and then jumps as the ground where he had lain erupts in flames. He activates his shield and turns to face the machine. An energy blast buffets him as he grabs his saber, ready to attack the legs if the 'cone of surprise' doesn't work.

The machine fires so many energy blasts at him that his shield cannot redirect all of the energy. He feels his shirt sleeve begin to melt. Suddenly a flash appears on the underside of the machine, causing the blaster fire to cease. Another, much larger flash follows and then a short jet of flame erupts from

the hole he had created. The machine shudders and shakes. Sparks fly from the vents on its side. The hatch cover flies into the air and flames erupt like a blowtorch from the top. The machine shudders again and stops moving. In slow motion it leans forward and then begins to fall. The ground shudders as the dead alien machine slams into the ground. Faint cheering can be heard.

Jeff turns to look for his partner. The row of buildings where David had been fighting is now nothing but rubble.

“Damn.”

He runs to the edge of the debris and yells out.

An officer runs up to him. “Damn, that was amazing! Who the hell are you? What the hell are you?”

“I’m just a man like you, who puts his pants on both legs at a time,” Jeff says as he climbs onto the rubble. “I need your help finding my buddy.”

He carefully walks over the rubble and yells out several times, “David, David, can you hear me?”

After a few minutes of carefully walking across the rubble he hears David call out.

“I hear you. Where are you?”

Thirty feet away Jeff sees a hand stick up out of the rubble and wave. Jeff turns and treads carefully toward the spot with the officer following close behind. He comes across David partially buried in the rubble with a particularly large beam lying across his legs.

Jeff smiles. “Man, I was worried I was going to have to break in a new partner.”

David gives a little laugh. “Ah, I didn’t know you cared. I must have set my stasis field for a little longer than I thought. I assume you took care of business?”

“Of course. Did you have any doubt?”

“Never.”

“Can you get out?”

David shakes his head. “Nah, beam’s got my legs pinned and I can’t get enough leverage.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

Jeff walks to the end of the beam and gives it a wiggle.

Jeff calls to the officer. “Officer, when I lift this try to pull him out.”

The cop looks at the beam. After witnessing how the two men took on the alien machine, he asks, “why don’t you just levitate it?”

Shaking his head Jeff says, “Sorry, Yoda I am not. Muscle power to move beam use I must.”

From his partner he hears, “cut it out and lift already!”

Making sure his footing is stable he grabs the beam and lifts. The beam moves maybe an inch.

“Damn,” the cop says to David. “That thing must weigh a ton.”

“Just a ton? Looks like he's been slacking off on his strength training!”

Jeff hears David's comment. “Hey, lay off. I just need to get a better grip.”

He moves in a few feet closer, grabs the beam, and lifts again. A section of the rubble just past his buddy begins to shift.

David yells, “That's it.”

The officer grabs David's outstretched arms and pulls him out. David stands as Jeff drops the beam.

The cop looks at them. “Who are you guys again?”

Putting his hands on his hips and striking a 'Superman-like' pose David says, “Why, we're Jedi, American Jedi. Yeah, that's it.”

He receives a strange look from Jeff.

“No really, I was just thinking while I was waiting for you to move the beam. T-shirts, mugs, giant foam fingers. The royalties alone would keep us in light saber batteries for a”

Jeff interrupts. “You sure you didn't hit your head before you turned on the stasis field, young Skywalker?”

The dumbfounded cop just stares at them, not sure if he should shake their hands for saving them from an alien invasion or arrest them for being smart-asses.

Before the officer can say anything Jeff asks David, “how many do you think there are?”

David shrugs. “Don't know. Last report showed almost two thousand lightening strikes world wide at the same time. Couldn't tell how many were natural and how many were related to our quiet friend over there.”

Jeff whistles. “What about the rest of the teams?”

“Not sure. I haven't heard anything since the call went out. I doubt we're the only team active though.

The cop just stands there, listening in amazement. *“Who are these guys and where did they get such futuristic weapons. They sure seem to know what they are doing, so they can't be from the government.”*

As they stand there the crowd returns, with some of the braver, or dumber, ones approaching the downed and still smoking machine.

Jeff pushes another button on his forearm device as he gives some advice to the officer, “You may want to setup a perimeter around that machine. It's probably harmless now, but there could be some nasty stuff that survived the burn. Best no one touches it.”

“Uh, yeah. I'll do that.” The officer turns to face the group gathering around the machine. He yells at someone about to crawl inside. “Hey, you, yeah you, get away from that!” He walks toward the machine. “Cause I said so, that's why.”

A loud whirring noise from above attracts everyone's attention. A machine resembling a giant vulture hovers over the crowd. The crowd panics and begins to run, thinking they are under attack. The machine slowly drops toward the ground. Once it has touched down the sides swing up to reveal an empty cockpit.

As the two men slide down the rubble and into the street Jeff calls out to the the cop. "When the Feds show up tell them we'll be in touch as soon as we can."

They hop in. The doors swing shut and the machine leaps into the air, quickly disappearing.

A second cop walks up to the first. "Who were those guys?"

At first all the cop can do is shake his head as the machine flies out of sight. "They call themselves American Jedi."