

Why Am I Doing This?

It has to do with my mom. I was her caregiver for seven years. During that time, my conventional writing career disappeared. My college teaching career vanished. Everything of my old life went away. I couldn't write, not for the first three years after my dad died. His death was the precipitating event for my long work with Mom. Her dementia consumed her mind and my time. Then I discovered video games. I am a PC nerd of immense proportions, but I never played games on my machines. It never occurred to me until one day at the Wal-Mart in Pratt, during one of those rare days when I found someone to sit with Mom. A copy of *Jedi Academy* was on sale for nine dollars. I bought it. It saved me.

I kept my mind alive by playing it. I played it in the only free time I had: during her naps in the afternoon and after she went to bed. Eventually I branched out. Since we were on a budget, I bought mostly older games that were on sale. *Jedi Outcast*, *Republic Commando*, *Knights of the Old Republic*, *Knights of the Old Republic II*, *Star Wars Battlefront 2*, and the venerable *Max Payne* series. But I always went back to *JA*. It worked on my mind, and I began to write again.

I'd scribble away in notebooks while Mom was watching TV or eating. Mostly I wrote about Jaden Korr, what it must have been like for her in the Undercity of Coruscant. I filled seven notebooks with stories of her adventures. Then I began to think about putting them into a coherent structure. I was mostly through with the first big story of her career, when the tornado hit.

Greensburg, Kansas, my hometown, the place I moved to after Dad died, the home I grew up in, the home I lived in, the place

where I cared for my mom, it was taken away. May, 2007, an EF5 tornado over two miles wide ate Greensburg. Mom, her cats, and I were buried in the wreckage of our house. We all survived.

I couldn't write. Not for a year. All of Jaden's notebooks had been lost to the storm. Then one day, it was like she whispered in my ear and I began to write about her again, just as I had before, sitting in the living room while Mom watched TV.

Mom died six months ago. My friend Jaden and her Jedi friends helped me through the grief. I am stronger than I was before. I am more capable than I was before.

Here are her stories. These aren't the Jedi of your childhood. These Jedi are a little more . . . muscular than their antecedents. Their Force powers are more apparent, their connection to the hidden aspects of the Force more overt. Teenagers can read these stories if they want, there is no profanity or overt sexuality in them. Lots of violence, though. Lots. These stories are based on an extremely violent video game. If you have the settings right, you can lop off arms and decapitate stormtroopers. What, did you think the lightsabers were just for show?

Enjoy yourself. I did. It kept me alive, it keeps me alive.

May the Force be with you.

R. P. Bird

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