In Soldier for the Empire, writer William Dietz and painter Dean Williams have accomplished something rare among the numerous spinoffs of the Star Wars films: a story that captures the essence of Star Wars while charting new territory in terms of character development. The story is a simple one. Like Luke Skywalker, Kyle Katarn is a young farm boy who dreams of the stars. But for Kyle, the way off his home world is through the Imperial Military Academy, not through a Jedi mentor. Just as Kyle reaches the end of his training in a vicious firefight on a Rebel-held asteroid, his father, Morgan, is killed in an Imperial attack. As he learns the truth behind his father's death, Kyle is awakened to a terrifying vision of the Empire that he has grown to respect, and he suddenly finds himself working for the Rebels to steal plans for the newly completed Death Star. By integrating Kyle's tale into the actual plot of Star Wars, Deitz makes his novel especially relevant for Star Wars fans. But what really drives Soldier for the Empire are the grim details that bring the war to life. Dietz's vision of the Empire recounts the awesome discipline of Nazi Germany, and his
descriptions of Dark Jedi Jerec are reminiscent of the twisted minds that must always stand behind organized evil. At the same time, by going inside the Empire (and into the psyches of Storm Troopers), Dietz reveals the seductive power of that evil. Dean Williamss award-winning paintings are a perfect complement to the story, creating a cinematic life for the text. Kyles tale continues in Rebel Agent and Jedi Knight. --Patrick OKelley

I had this book for a year before I actually read it. Since I primarily bought it for the great, poster quality, painted, full page illustrations it didnt matter. Besides I was under the impression that it was a juvenile, a kids book. Yeah, right, this is about as much a juvenile as is Heileins _Starship Troopers_. There are some very gritty combat scenes here- and very well developed characters of depth. This is amazing in a novella of less than 120 pages (after you subtract the illustration pages.) There are hack writers out there that would have told this same story in 300 or 400, or more, pages, but Dietz does it in less than 120 without omitting any detail, atmosphere, or continuity. Thats the mark of a very skilled writer. Combined with the cover quality illustrations this book is practically a cinema quality experience all by itself. Moreover, I had not read the first two books of the trilogy, nor played the games, yet the book held together on its own.

Another thing, for a book that is so good on the combat and technical atmosphere, the metaphysics are also very satisfying. The tale of Lord Hoth and the Army of Light is truly worthy of the best of the Star Wars mythos. Indeed, it could almost be a grand finale in itself.

As a measure of how in to this I got, I finally ordered that universal remote shaped like a light saber for the TV. Hey, I needed a new remote anyway....

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