

# DARTH VADER GROTESQUE



## What does Darth Vader have to do with the Cathedral?

Welcome to Washington National Cathedral.

Darth Vader is one of the numerous carved grotesques on the Cathedral. Like gargoyles, grotesques carry rain water away from the building's walls. Gargoyles carry away excess water via pipes running through their mouths; grotesques deflect rainwater by bouncing it off the top of their heads, noses or other projecting parts, and away from the stone walls.

How did Darth Vader, a fictional villain from the *Star Wars* movies, end up on the wall of Washington National Cathedral?

In the 1980s the Cathedral, with National Geographic *World* magazine, sponsored a competition for children to design decorative sculpture for the Cathedral. The third-place winner was Christopher Rader of Kearney, Nebraska who submitted a drawing of this futuristic representation of evil. Darth Vader was placed on the northwest tower with the other winning designs: a raccoon, a girl with pigtails and braces and a man with large teeth and an umbrella.

The fierce head was sculpted by Jay Hall Carpenter and carved by Patrick J. Plunkett.

To find Darth Vader, you have to leave the building through the ramp entrance. This is located at the northwest corner of the nave, through the double wooden doors of Lincoln Bay (behind the statue of Abraham Lincoln). Go down the ramp, and step into the parking lot. Then, turn around and look back up at the tower closest to you. He is almost impossible to see without the assistance of binoculars.

Waaaaay up, almost at the top of the tower is a gablet, or small peaked roof, located between the two huge louvered arches. At the bottom of each slope of this roof is a carved grotesque. Darth Vader is on the north, or right-hand side.

Another way to look is to start at the top of the tower. There are two large pinnacles, or points, on the corners of the tower and a much smaller one in the center. Come down from the small, center pinnacle and the gablet is the first one you will find.

There is a carved skull situated on a gablet much closer to the ground which is often mistaken for Darth Vader. From this skull, Darth Vader is up and to the left.

