

The ride to Bestine was, thankfully, a relatively short two-and-a-half-day trip from Omega Station, our transport making good time for its size class. Unfortunately, while the *Staggered Bantha* was technically capable of transporting all of us on top of our two clone pilots, the interior of the light freighter was cramped and miserable. Our group was clearly pushing what was reasonable for the ship to transport. We spent the time keeping as busy as possible, running everyone through a crash course on countering, fighting, and escaping Force users.

We went over the general abilities they could expect from a trained force user, things like enhanced reflexes, telekinesis, and the ability to soften falls, jump really high, and block blaster bolts with their lightsaber. We also went over some of the more rare abilities, things that we were unlikely to see any of the Inquisitors use, save maybe the Grand Inquisitor. Once we went over them, we started discussing how best to defeat them.

"Just about the worst thing you could do when fighting any Force user is to shoot at them. Especially when they aren't close enough to stab you yet," I explained. "The ability to block and reflect blaster bolts is basically their bread and butter. They *will* see it coming, and they will reflect it back at you or an ally. And since they tap pretty deeply into the Force to do that, expect the blaster bolts to return with better accuracy than it left."

"There are, however, some times you *can* shoot at a force user," Ahsoka added. "It's always dangerous, but it can be used to slow someone down since the act of running and deflecting is considered mildly more difficult. Many Jedi, dark or otherwise, will slow down and default to simply blocking rather than reflecting a blaster bolt if they are moving."

"Splitting their focus between enough people can also overwhelm them, but most would simply move away rather than allow themselves to be pushed too far," I continued. "Now, these Force users will be pulling from the Dark side, so their buttons will be things like anger, greed, a thirst for power, or even a desire for revenge. You can use that to trip them up or spur them on, but be careful. If you aren't in a position of equality or power, they will dismiss your words for groveling or begging. It's all about power plays with them."

"I... Suppose that is true," Ahsoka admitted. "They are likely to see an offer for a deal as useless, even if the offer is genuine and entirely in their favor if it is offered while you are losing."

"Oh, and never believe anything they say, including but not limited to 'We have your 'blank' surrender, or we will kill them,' and 'You're too late, we already have what we want' Or even 'Your friends have betrayed you, do as I say,'" I explained, Ahsoka turning to look at me. "Trust me, they are lying. No one here is willing to betray us or anything else. Also, none of them are kind enough to take prisoners without a direct order, and if they have been ordered to take prisoners, they can't kill them without breaking those orders."

As I talked, Ahsoka's eyes went a bit wide, eventually looking away and shaking her head.

"You know... I can remember a few times when realizing all of that would have really helped," Ahsoka said with a self-deprecating scoff. "Ventress said some of those things. Nearly verbatim."

"How about that? Getting proper explanations rather than keeping concepts, ideas, and knowledge forbidden leads to a better educated and effective person," I said with a blank face. "Who would have thought?"

She winced for a moment before shaking her head and continuing the lesson. We went over several other things, including the effectiveness of explosives and how to predict where and what was going to be thrown at you with telekinesis.

"They might have abilities, but while the Force is potent, it lacks a lot of the flexibility I have," I explained. "By forcing them to confront different things, preferably at the same time, they can be overwhelmed."

The group nodded, looking slightly more confident than when we had started. Unfortunately, it was time for me to temper that confidence.

Now, let's be clear here. Ahsoka and I will be the primary answer to any Inquisitor we might meet," I explained. "If you stumble into them, run, break line of sight, and let us take care of them. My abilities are particularly difficult for them to deal with."

The lessons continued for a while, stopping when we finally dropped out of hyperspace around the planet Bestine. While we were still a reasonable distance from the planet, Ahsoka checked a covert source to confirm that the stone signal was still going through. This was the last time we would be able to check this source without attracting attention, so from that point on, we simply had to hope that they would make it.

We landed on Bestine after an hour of waiting in space around the planet. The ship was boarded and quickly searched, with nothing more than a quick scan and walk around the interior. Our IDs were also checked, and the fake information passed the inspection without complaint. When we made it to the planet's surface, we said goodbye to our clone pilots, who would be ordering some basic things to ship out as a cover, while we headed to a nearby ship berth.

Our next ride was a familiar-looking [commercial hyperspace shuttle](#). Tickets were a bit on the expensive side, at least relative to most space journeys, but manageable. Within three hours of landing on the planet, we were sitting down inside the shuttle, waiting for take off.

At this point we had split off into pairs. Julius and Tatnia were sitting behind me by a few rows, while Nal sat with me. Vaz and Ahsoka were in front of us on the opposite side, sitting just behind the cockpit. While traveling together in a large group wouldn't be that out of the ordinary, I wanted every advantage we could have in landing on Foless unmolested.

When we finally lifted off, I sent Ahsoka a look, the Togruta Force user catching my eye as the pilot warned of an imminent jump to lightspeed. I gave her a subtle nod, which she returned, turning back to face forward. It was not the most subtle thing, but we were surrounded by random people, not Imperial agents.

The trip between Bastine and Foless was blessedly under twenty-four hours. Despite that, it was still a horrendous experience. We were stuck inside the tiny ship, unable to move around, stretch our legs, or do anything but read on a datapad or stare out the window to pass the time. The only bright spot for the trip was that the refresher was halfway decent, and I was sitting beside Nal, not some random person who would hog the seat.

I managed to pass a third of the trip by sleeping, spending the other time gently circulating my mana. By this point, the exercise was mostly useless since I could keep it going nearly indefinitely with barely any side effects, but I was determined to get every little erg of extra mana from it. I was hoping that the next unlock in my grimoire would reveal a more advanced technique, but I wouldn't know for sure until that happened.

When we finally dropped out of hyperspace around Foless, we were greeted by two Star Destroyers hovering in orbit. Our intel from the Rebellion told us there were at least three stationed around the trade hub, meaning a third was likely on the other side of the planet. Beyond those two massive ships, there were also plenty of other, smaller ones in view, including at least four Gozantis and five other ships that were too far away for me to make out. It was hard to imagine this sort of reaction for a pair of kids, which made me think the Inquisitors suspect actual Jedi involvement.

It took another two hours for us to be given permission to land, the small commuter shuttle heading down to the largest city on the planet. Shortly after we landed, we exited the ship and entered the waiting care of Imperial customs with the support of nearly a dozen stormtroopers. Each person was questioned, scanned and searched before being released.

At this point, I had half resigned myself to being forced to fight through the spaceport before trying to disappear in the large city around it, but by some miracle, the IDs that Racer made for us passed the inspection. Even better, our changed faces didn't bring up any connection to our actual identities either. It was honestly baffling how well it worked, but I simply thanked the Force for inept bureaucracy and took the win.

Once we had passed security and customs, our weapons were returned to us after having passed through inspection. Ahsoka's toolbelt also passed inspection, meaning we all had access to at least basic weapons. We left the starport, still in our pairs, going our separate ways to avoid attracting attention.

As Nal and I walked through the dense city, we got a close-up look at the intense Imperial presence. Tie fighters and Imperial airspeeders flew over the city nearly constantly, the screeching a steady reminder of the firepower the Empire had brought to bear. While the air was

filled with speeders and starfighters, the Star Destroyers must have emptied themselves completely of their stormtroopers because we didn't go more than thirty seconds without seeing a patrol. They were stopping random people, especially those with kids, scanning their faces before roughly telling them to move on.

The entire city felt oppressive and filled with a nervous, on-edge energy, like a giant powder keg about to go off. The citizens were openly confused about what was happening. All they had been told was that there was a dangerous fugitive on the loose, with images of the agent and the two children spread around nearly everywhere. They were labeled as dangerous and wanted for crimes against the Empire, a label that was immediately called into question since two of them were literal children.

We made our way to our pre-determined meeting point, a hole-in-the-wall bar. I paid extra to get a private table, settling down in a closed-off room in the back of the bar. About ten minutes after we arrived, Vaz and Ahsoka showed up, followed by Julius and Tatnia. I was honestly glad that we had spent nearly three days getting used to each other's new faces as we traveled because each time they walked in, I had to stop myself from standing and asking them to leave, confusing them for strangers.

"Any issues?" I asked once all of us were nursing drinks, nothing too strong since we needed to stay focused.

"We got stopped in the streets, but everything was fine," Tatnia said with a shrug. "Julius almost did something stupid, but I dragged him away."

I looked over at the slightly younger member of the crew, raising an eyebrow.

"They got a little too rough," Julius explained, looking more than a little annoyed. "I reacted badly. It won't happen again."

"Make sure it doesn't," I said, giving him an eye. "All of this will be the success of the century if all we have to do is deal with a little shoving and some invasive scans."

Julius let out a breath and nodded, seeming to get the message. We were deep behind enemy lines now. We didn't have room for fuck ups or mistakes.

As we talked, discussing the heavy Imperial presence, Ahsoka began constructing her lightsabers. The process was simple in comparison to what I had anticipated, the once Jedi snapping a few things to gather, adjusting some parts before locking it all in place with screws and latches. Unlike what I knew from Legends media and what was shown in some of the newer Disney canon, she didn't even need to tap into the Force.

Apparently, stepping so profoundly into the flow of the force was specifically important during the first time assembling the weapon. It didn't even need to be that showy, it was just

about letting the Force flow through you to harmonize the parts in ways machining never could. Like any skill in the Force, some sensitives were skilled in it and could assemble a lightsaber in seconds from parts skimmed from a junkyard, while others struggled to build them in perfect condition, with hand-picked and crafted parts.

While Ahsoka was assembling her weapon, Nal was using one of the tools from her belt to adjust our blaster pistols, going one by one to disable the energy throttling and return the weapons to max power. In total, both processes took nearly an hour, and when they were done, we were reasonably armed. I could tell that Nal and Vaz, in particular, were already missing their heavier weapons, especially Vaz, but we had to make do with what we had. Besides, I had a feeling it wouldn't be long before we had a chance to skim a few blaster rifles off someones hands.

After we were done, we regrouped into two separate parties: Nal, Vaz, and myself in one, and Ahsoka, Tatnia, and Julius in the other. We left the bar within twenty minutes of each other, and both groups headed to different accommodations. In all likelihood, we wouldn't be spending much time in them, but having a reasonably secure space we could lock ourselves inside of could come in handy and was well worth the three hundred credits for each group.

Once safely inside our rooms, we had several hours to kill. Our targets wouldn't arrive at the message stone until late at night, and we arrived on the planet just before lunchtime. This left us time to sleep and recover from the most recent branch of our mission. Jumping from planet to planet, even just two, had left all of us tense, sore, and tired. Thankfully, I could fix some of that with a simple healing spell, and some sleep in an actual bed would fix the other.

Even if Nal and I ended up splitting a bed.

When we eventually woke up, the city was considerably darker, though, like most cities, it was definitely not what I would consider to actually be dark. Looking out the window of our cramped room, I could see hundreds of moving speeders, both on the ground and in the air, with a significant amount of lighting keeping the city lit despite the sun having long since set.

Once we were all awake and ready, we waited for the agreed-upon time to leave and headed out to find somewhere to watch the message stone.

Now, all of this was a specific choice we had settled on during our planning phase. We could have skipped over waiting around with a simple Clairvoyance spell since we knew what all three of our targets looked like. However, we wanted to take this on as calmly as possible to keep from spooking and setting off the Force-sensitive child. Meeting the older, much more controlled Rebel agent as she left to leave the subtle message for her compatriot was a much safer bet. That way, we didn't have to worry about Felia reacting by touching the Force and alerting every Force-sensitive person on the planet.

So, as much as it added to the complexity of the mission, for now, it was better to sit back, keep an eye on the location, and wait.