

The trip to Lothal from Alpha Base was about a day long, a surprisingly short trip, all things considered. That included a full night, which was good since having to deal with politics and Rebel leadership had left me drained. They had basically ambushed us, either intentionally or as a byproduct of waving their hands and summoning Ashoka and I. Granted, Mon Mothma was the leader of the Rebellion, so I had to assume that there was a level of urgency to the meeting if for no other reason than how busy the woman was. Still, it grated to be dragged along like that, like it was expected.

Once we left Alpha Base and set our course, Ahsoka and Luke spent most of their time with Felia, teaching her how to open her mind, expand her senses, and guide herself into the Force. Thankfully, Ahsoka believed she was both young enough and had the right mentality to mediate into that connection, or we would have had her running around the ship, trying to achieve kinetic meditation like Luke had.

By this time, Luke had gotten a firm grasp on "proper" meditation as well, using the Force as a way to calm and steady himself without the need for mind-numbing levels of physical activity.

With the Force-sensitives of the group secluded in the cargo bay, eyes closed and meditating, Claron and I were on our own. Rather than let him dwell on being separated from his sister, even if it was only by a dozen meters or so, I kept him entertained by playing hologames and telling him stories. Unfortunately, I wasn't the best storyteller, and getting beaten by a child at just about every hologame we had quickly got old. Luckily, I had plenty of stories to pull from, so my poor telling was saved by the variety.

"So, then Aladdin looked up at the genie, having enjoyed his singing immensely despite being confused," I said with a smile. "Of course, young Aladdin was in love, so-

I stopped when I felt a slight pressure on my shoulder, turning to see that Claron had fallen asleep, sliding down the couch to lean on me. I couldn't help but chuckle, before carefully standing and picking him up, carrying him to his room, laying him down in his bed. It was a bit early to be sleeping, but I wasn't about to wake him up and scold him for it. The kid was tired, and there was no reason to try and keep him awake.

Plus, I desperately wanted to sleep as well.

The next morning, Ahsoka woke me up to say we were about to drop from Hyperspace, which meant she wanted me on the bridge. Lothal was technically abandoned by the Empire, driven off by the Rebels. In reality, they only *stayed away* because it didn't have anything that they wanted. Yes, there was some farming, some light industrialization, and some minor Imperial production facilities. This planet was barely worth the effort, and I had to assume that since General Synduall had been part of the team trying to free it, the real attention came from her partner's connection to the Force. Now, *that* would bring the Empire's attention down to a backwater world.

However, their newly acquired shield of indifference had a pretty serious flaw. If the Empire were to suddenly learn that Lothal was producing weapons for the Rebellion, hosting a Rebel military base, or was a stopping point for a small group of Force-sensitives and a single mage, the Empire would return. Worse, there would be no mercy. Instead, the Imperial Navy would most likely just stomp the major cities flat before leaving.

This was why we made no effort to contact any sort of planet flight control, and most likely why no one tried to call us out. The less they knew, the better, even if purposeful ignorance had its own limitations.

The *Starcaller* dropped out of Hyperspace and immediately started to descend, making a beeline for one of the planet's many cities. We didn't drop too low since the city wasn't our target, but Ahsoka did use it as a guiding point on our way to our real goal.

We angled away from the city as we slid lower into the atmosphere, getting closer and closer to the ground. Eventually Ahsoka guided us to a lone [communications tower](#), a main relay point for Lothalnet, the planet's internet equivalent. Once the ship was landed, everyone climbed out, stepping on the planet's surface. I took a deep breath and looked around, a small smile on my face, which Ahsoka noticed almost immediately.

"What is it?" She asked, looking around at the base of the large tower.

"Every once in a while, it hits me that I'm traveling between planets," I explained. "When I was younger, I would have given anything to be here. As I got older, I thought that dream was silly. Now I'm here, working with the next age of Jedi, exploring the Galaxy, and running a group of Mercenary Rebels. It's just a hell of a trip."

"You know, I don't think you've ever talked about where you were from," Ahsoka pointed out. "I don't even know the name of it. All I know is that it's some sort of backwater planet."

"... It's called Earth," I responded, looking up at the tower as we walked closer to the single door at the base. It was deceptively large, making the structure look smaller than it actually was. "We hardly ever left our planet. Besides me, it only happened a handful of times. It was a pretty low-tech word, slow to shift anything cohesive. Beyond that... Well, it's a lot like other human worlds. We tend to bicker amongst ourselves when we get bored, but... well, it was home."

"You don't consider it home anymore?"

"It's an uncharted planet," I explained with a shrug. "As far as I know, nobody knows how to get to it. I made it off in a fluke, and immediately got snatched up by slavers, which is how I met Tatnia and Nal."

"What about your Clairvoyance?" She asked. "Couldn't you find your way back with that?"

"It wouldn't matter," I explained. "It still isn't home. I've changed too much and gained too much. I was nothing like this in my old life, a swashbuckling mercenary, diving into danger for money and glory. My family would hardly even recognize me."

I wince internally for lying but managed to use the truth as much as possible. Even as I did, I somehow forgot about one of my most important abilities and almost got caught in a lie. Thankfully, I did at least partially believe what I said, which made the whole thing quite a bit more somber now that I was voicing it out loud.

Even if I could return, I would never go back to my old life. I was having too much fun with this one. Sure, I would love to go back for a day, say goodbye properly, and tell everyone I was doing well, but that was impossible, so it wasn't worth dwelling on.

As we walked, Ashoka broke me out of my thoughts by putting her hand on my shoulder and giving me a supportive squeeze. Looking over at her, I could see that she could tell there were some things I wasn't saying. Thankfully, judging by the lack of accusations, she seemed okay with not knowing everything.

We were a few dozen feet from the base of the tower when the entrance opened, and two people stepped out. I recognized them both, primarily through context, as while I had watched a few episodes of Rebels, it had been a while ago for me. The man, [Ezra Bridger](#), looked vaguely Arabic to me, with even his outfit pulling from that general local, namely layers of cloth pulled around to form clothes, closed with belts and a single strap. The woman, [Sabine Wren](#), was a head shorter than her companion, with dyed purple and orange hair. She was also clad in what I would consider light Mandalorian armor, with even a helmet hanging down from her hip.

"Ahsoka! Good to see you," Ezra said with a smile, walking forward and giving Togruta a hug. "When you commed, I was starting to think I would need to go to Ilium or something."

I could see as he walked he had a slight limp, and when he reached out to hug Ahsoka, one of his arms hung down by his side.

"You never would have made it," Sabine said, rolling her eyes. "They have half a fleet stationed over it."

"Desperate times call for desperate measures," The black-haired man responded, turning to look at Sabine.

As he did, I caught sight of light, heavily treated scarring along the side of his face and down his neck. It looked to me like a burn that reached all the way to his ear before suddenly stopping. That made me think the ear was either a replacement or a prosthetic.

Sabine punched his shoulder, causing him to step away and raise his hands in defense, though he was chuckling the whole time. His movement revealed a standard-looking lightsaber at her hip. He then turned to me and stuck out his hand.

"You must be Deacon. Ahsoka told us about you," He said as I took his hand and shook it. "I gotta say, I'm glad she found somewhere to settle down a bit. She needs it."

Ahsoka scowled in a way that reminded me of how my sister would scowl when I would tease her.

"It's nice to meet you Ezra, I've heard good things about you as well," I responded, before looking at Sabine. "And Sabine Wren. I have some business to discuss with you once we settle in. Assuming you're coming with us?"

"And let this guy out of my sight?" She said, giving me a look as she tried to puzzle out what I had meant. "No, he needs someone to keep him out of trouble."

It only took us a few minutes to move everyone into the *Starcaller*. Not only did we have to move Ezra and Sabine's stuff, but the two of them had picked up some foodstuff and other supplies for the trip. While loading everything up, Ezra had to take a break twice, which no one called him out on. For one of them, he had to sit on a cargo crate, rubbing his leg about halfway up his thigh. We all politely ignored him since it was clear he wasn't looking for pity or help.

Once everything was loaded, we once again took off into space. As before, Ahsoka took the pilot's seat, with Luke as her co-pilot. I was finally not required in the cockpit at all, since Sabine was a skilled pilot and gunner, making her the better choice to sit in the cockpit's third spot.

With my previous spot taken, I sat back with Ezra, Felia, and Claron. Felia and Claron, in a rare and welcome show of childishness, excitedly introduced themselves to Ezra, before asking a hundred and one questions about the Force, Ezra's training, and what they were doing at Lothal. The man was fielding the questions pretty well but was starting to get overwhelmed. Luckily, I knew the key to distracting kids.

I handed them each a datapad with games on it and a few pieces of candy, before sending them to the cargo hold to play.

"Lively pair, huh?" Ezra said, letting out a long breath. "Been a while since I had to deal with kids."

"Yeah... I think they are overcompensating," I guessed with a frown. "They missed a good chunk of their childhood living on the streets."

"Ah... fair enough," He responded.

As he looked down the hall that the kids had just left through, I had the opportunity to really get a good look at him. He was a young man, maybe twenty-five, though probably lower. He showed clear physical signs of some pretty intense trauma, but he didn't behave traumatized in the slightest.

"Get a good eyeful?" He asked, looking back at me with a smirk.

"Sorry. Just trying to take your measure," I explained with a shrug.

"Can't blame you, Sabine was doing the same thing to you," He responded.

"Not you, though?"

"No, I just trust in the Force. I get a good feeling from you, and that's more than enough for me," He explained as if it was really that simple."

"And she doesn't?" I asked. "Kind of important for a Force-sensitive, isn't it?"

"Force... Do you mean Sabine? She isn't Force-sensitive," He responded, with furrowed eyebrows. "Why would you think that?"

"The lightsaber on her hip?"

"Oh! That's mine. Or it was," He explained, scratching the scarring along his neck. "I left it for her when I... took down Thrawn."

"Wait... if you have one, why did you need to come with us for another?"

"Because it's not mine, not anymore," He repeated. "When I came back and tried to use it, the Kyber crystal had sort of... switched allegiances. It was in tune with her, so I let her have it. I could have overrode that with some time and patience, but it didn't feel right."

"Hold on, I'm confused. If she doesn't have a very strong connection to the Force... how did a lightsaber attune itself to her?" I asked. "I'm not an expert, but wouldn't that require at least some power in the Force?"

"I...huh..." Ezra sat there, looking at me as he tried to think of why my assumption would be incorrect, only to come up short. "That's... something we should probably ask Ahsoka's lightsaber specialist."

"Good idea. Maybe hold off on mentioning it to her, though?" I suggested with a wince. "At least until the expert can comment on it?"

"Fair."

We chatted for a few more minutes before Ahsoka, Luke, and Sabine returned from the cockpit, sitting around the lounge. Just as I was sliding over so Ashoka could sit, Ezra was doing the same for Sabine. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught Luke turning and coughing into his hand, covering something up in the process, but I missed what it was.

"So, you mentioned you had business with me?" Sabine asked, leaning forward in her seat. "What's on your mind?"

"Well, you've got connections to Mandalore, but Ashoka has told me those connections are complicated. She also said that it was your story to explain," I said, Sabine giving Ashoka an appreciative nod. "I respect that, so instead of demanding answers before we even get the chance to know each other, I have a different question. As a Mandalorian, what would be your reaction to finding that someone had discovered a source of beskar that *wasn't* from [Mandalore](#) or its moon."

Sabine's eyes went wide, and her jaw dropped as I asked my question. Ezra seemed just as surprised as she was, though he clearly didn't have the same emotional connection to what I had said. After finally recovering, the warrior leaned forward and gave me a hard searching look.

"I think you're going to have to start from the beginning."