

We followed the Jedi Knight at a pretty good pace, first running along the street for a bit before eventually climbing up a pile of rubble. From there, we moved along a cleared and well-worn path on top of various collapsed buildings.

As we moved, I contacted Ezra and explained the situation. He was stunned that the man identified himself as a Jedi Knight.

"At the end of the day, we have the upper hand," I assured him. "As potent as a Jedi is, there's not much they can do against a bombardment. If things spiral, I will call you in."

"You want me to shoot a Jedi?" Ezra asked, outrage starting to creep into his voice.

"Jedi is a four-letter word, not an immutable title," I explained. "Anyone could call themselves that. Besides, I don't want to do that any more than you. I just recognize that we might have to anyway."

"...Understood," Ezra finally responded, a begrudging agreement if I had ever heard one. "Keep me updated."

I gave him a final confirmation before tucking my comms unit into my belt. Judging by the look the Twi'lek male sent me, he had absolutely heard me the entire conversation. Which was good because a threat only works when someone knows about it.

After running along the top of the buildings for a reasonable amount of time, all while getting frequent updates about the increasing number of monsters following us from Ezra, we finally reached the base of the mountain. Amescoll led us all into a large opening, a tunnel carved into the stone. Everything was worn from time, with dirt and plants growing into the tunnel for several feet before petering out. Even with all that, the craftsmanship and design of the tunnel were unmistakable, with worn murals and decorations lining the walls.

After walking a dozen meters or so into the mountain, we arrived at what was, at one point, a turbolift shaft. The internal and external parts of the lift, including the door, were cut up and torn out, haphazardly placed along the side of the tunnel. All of it, including the wall and control panel around the lift shaft, showed signs of being attacked by the monsters, with claw and bite marks covering the metal and even the stone.

"The ocean dwellers, they cannot climb, at least not very well," Knight Amescoll explained as he leaned into the shaft and whistled loudly. "So we sealed ourselves up high to protect ourselves."

"Smart," I commented, looking in after the Jedi pulled back. "So how do you get up?"

Instead of responding, he reached out and grabbed the back of my armor, pulling me out of the doorway and back into the hall. Just in time, too, as a coil of cable slapped into the bottom

of the shaft, shooting up a small cloud of dust. A quick look showed that the cable extended upwards into the shaft. Attached to the cable were three old, worn, but still serviceable-looking harnesses.

"Ah, that answers my question," I (nodded, looking back at Amescoll. "Thanks for the save."

It took us a while to get everyone up, first sending Sabine and Luke up with the dark-skinned human. After that, Amescoll's Twi'lek companion went up by themselves. This was done specifically because we didn't want less than two people down at the base of the shaft alone. Ezra was keeping us updated on the ocean dwellers, as Knight Amescoll called them. They weren't quite stalking us directly anymore, but there was no way I was going to strand one person by themselves, or even a pair by themselves, while they were still around.

The ride up to where the turbolift shaft led was surprisingly long, and when we arrived, it was clear why. The cable ran through a pulley system made of pipes, where it was being pulled by a quartet of younger people of three different species. The fact that they looked even younger than the pair traveling with Knight Amescoll told me that something interesting was going on.

After stepping out of the turbo lift, I helped Ahsoka do the same before finally getting a proper look around. Beyond the people pulling up the cable, I could see that what had once been a decent-sized hanger bay was now a living space for around fifteen people. Along one wall were shelters, clearly built for privacy more than anything. Just inside the entrance of the hangar was a large garden. From where I was, I could spot various food plants growing at several stages.

Beyond the garden, I could see a few rain catchers set up on the landing platform. Everywhere I looked, I could see cobbled-together furniture made from ship parts and salvaged materials, including tables and chairs using ship chairs, most likely taken from the *Crucible*. There was even some sort of bird coop tucked into a corner near the hangar opening.

What really drew my eye, however, was the view beyond that. It seemed that coming up the turbolift shaft had been more disorienting than I had thought, because I had no idea we were facing away from the island, the open hangar overlooking the ocean, hundreds of feet up along the cliff. In the distance, through a thick layer of mist, I could just make out the mainland peeking through.

"Please, come with me," Amescoll said, snapping my attention away from the incredible view. "We have much to discuss, I think."

The older man gestured for us to follow him, leading us through the large living space. Almost everyone was watching us, closely keeping track as we crossed the hangar before finally sitting around one of the larger tables. Sabine looked a little tense while Luke looked around wildly, clearly fascinated by everything that was happening. Ahsoka had

unfortunately retreated into her stoic, impenetrable expression as she tried to come to terms with what was happening.

"Take a seat if you would like," Amescoll insisted, quickly taking his own seat at the table. "Please excuse everyone's curiosity. You're the first new people we have seen in quite some time."

"Yeah, definitely getting that feeling," I commented, sitting at the table opposite of him, the rest of the team following suit on either side of me.

Before anyone could talk, an older woman came to the table and set out some cups and a large jug of water. She then kissed Knight Amescoll's cheek before walking away. I nearly cheered as they shared a loving, caring look before she left.

When Amescoll had revealed himself to be a Jedi Knight, I was worried all my progress in getting Luke and Ahsoka to loosen up would be ruined. Now, it looked like I might actually have stumbled onto an ally. I couldn't help but peek at Ahsoka, almost letting a chuckle out at her stunned face.

"Before I answer your questions, I would like to ask one of my own," Amescoll said, quickly continuing. "What exactly are you looking for? I assume you followed the will of the Force to find us since this planet doesn't exist on any records, and anything worthwhile the system may contain was removed as well. I could hardly imagine that you just stumbled upon us, considering the... variety of members."

The older, graying man seemed to switch between talking to myself and Ahsoka, as if he was unsure who was in command. Normally, at that point, I would say something to subtly inform him, but this was not a Skyforged Operation. After the table was silent for a few seconds, Ahsoka seemed to realize what was going on, so she spoke up.

"In truth, we are searching for... Professor Huyang," She admitted with a wince. "We did not anticipate living survivors, though looking back, that seems foolish."

"The Professor? Why?" He responded, now looking genuinely confused.

"Professor Huyang has unique knowledge of lightsaber construction, and he is a walking encyclopedia of Jedi history," Ahsoka explained. "We lost so much, and the hope was that by recovering him, we could get some of that back."

"That... Yes, an excellent plan," Amescoll agreed with a smile. "The Professor was always an interesting resource, but if we lost as much as you say, his knowledge would become invaluable."

"What happened to you guys?" Luke asked, leaning forward. "How did you end up here?"

"Ah... I suppose I should explain ourselves..." He admitted with a chuckle. "Many years ago, during the day of betrayal, when the Republic turned on us, I was stationed on the *Crucible* as guide and guardian to the Padawans participating in the Gathering."

The man gestured to some of the older people hanging around. Now that I could see everyone at once, there were three noticeable age levels throughout the group. The first only had three members, Amescoll, the woman who kissed him, and another older male [Rodian](#). Under that was a group of eight people of various races and genders, including the Twi'lek and dark-skinned human that had been with him when we first met. After that, five younger people, teenagers really.

"When our clone escort turned on us, we were stuck in space for nearly a day as we made our repairs. In the end, that delay saved our lives, as we would have arrived back at Coruscant before receiving Master Obi-Wan's warning to stay away from the temple," He admitted, shaking his head. "In a way, our clone escort saved our lives."

"It wasn't their fault," I said, the older man looking at me. "The clones were grown with a biological control chip in their brains. On it were orders they could not refuse, including the one to turn on the Jedi. Even the strongest of them all couldn't fully resist it."

"And another mystery is solved," he responded with a somber smile. "It does not bring them back, but... I am glad to hear my friends did not willingly turn on us."

We were quiet for a moment, pouring cups of water and sipping from them as the man mourned for a moment. Eventually, he coughed and continued his story.

"Anyway, when our patchwork repairs were complete, as complete as they could be at least, we debated where we should go. Some suggested the unknown regions, and some suggested Alderaan or other sympathetic planets. It was Professor Huyang who suggested this planet, taking time to explain its origins. Upon hearing that it was so well protected and already had structures we could live out of, we decided it would be the perfect place to take shelter, at least temporarily. In the end, our ship failed as we landed, so we were forced to remain here, passing time by studying the ruins."

"What about the monsters?" Sabine asked.

"The ocean dwellers are a relatively new development," He admitted with a scowl. "When we first arrived, we noticed some sort of field emitter around the perimeter of the island. We assumed it was some sort of protective shield, to keep out floods or large waves. We now believe it was a deterrent for the ocean dwellers. We can't be sure, but I believe they leave the water to hunt for food during the planet's humid period, which, from what we have observed, happens on a schedule spanning many years. We arrived during the 'dry season,' as it were, so they were not here when we arrived."

"So you escape the Empire, set up camp, and years later, the... ocean dwellers start crawling out of the water?" Sabine confirmed, wincing at the responding nod. "That's rough."

"Indeed. We lost a padawan and a member of the *Crucible's* crew when they first came from the water," He explained, shaking his head. "They attempted to take cover inside the ship..."

"We saw the damage," I admitted, shaking my head. "I am sorry for your loss."

"They are with the Force. We may take solace in that," He responded with a faint smile, pausing before continuing his story. "By a fluke, we learned they were terrible climbers, so we took shelter up here. We have been living up here ever since then."

"That is an impressive story," I said with a nod. "You should be proud of your survival."

"Thank you. Some aspects have been more challenging than others," He admitted. "Not knowing what was going on with the rest of the galaxy has been particularly difficult."

"Well... A lot has happened since Order 66, what you call the Day of Betrayal," Ahsoka explained. "The Empire has been in control since the end of the Clone Wars, but a rebellion has risen..."

Ahsoka spent about twenty minutes explaining the bullet points of the last twenty or so years. The crowd, who remained at a respectable distance but did nothing to hide that they were all listening, gasped and cheered at the news of the Rebels going strong. The news of Alderaan struck a cord that silenced everyone.

"We felt it, through the Force," Knight Amescoll responded, shaking his head. "No doubt most Force-sentatives in the galaxy did. It was as if the void was filled with screams for help before everything suddenly went silent. We could all feel that a tragedy had occurred."

Most of the crowd around us shivered as he recalled the sensation, phantom feelings of loss and horror returning to them. They looked cold despite the repressive heat. A dark part of me wondered if that moment could be used to find more Force-sensitives. It was clearly a feeling that stuck with you, which meant we could ask someone if they remember feeling horrible the day Tarkin gave the order.

I shook the thought away and continued to listen to Ahsoka's abridged explanation of the last twenty years, giving a little wave and solute when she mentioned the Skyforged Vanguard. When she was eventually done, Knight Amescoll leaned back, studying all of us.

"A lot has changed since we landed here, first in voluntary seclusion, then in involuntary stranding," He commented. "This Rebellion, you believe it in?"

"I have to," Ahsoka responded without hesitation. "I have to believe that under the oppressive regime that Palpatine has created, those who can fight would stand up and protect those who cannot. Even before the destruction of Alderaan, the Empire has committed many crimes, not the least of which is the murder of the Jedi Order."

The man let out a long breath, nodding in understanding.

"I do not mourn for the Order," He admitted with a frown. "Here, stranded, surrounded by the ruins of our ancient ancestors, I have had time to reflect on the Order. We all have. I believe the Order was doomed long before the Clone Wars began. No, I don't mourn it, but I do mourn its members. The innocent, the thousands that were slaughtered."

Silence once again ruled over the table while Amescoll took a long drink from his mug.

"I am glad to see at least so many traveling with you, Ahsoka Tano," He eventually said, placing his cup back down. "Are you teaching them the ways of the Force?"

"I am passing what I know on to Luke," She explained. "With hopes that we will someday find someone more suitable to teach him. Deacon and Sabine's connection to the Force is too weak to be properly trained."

"Not that we need it," Sabine insisted, with a slight hint of disappointment in her voice. "I do just fine with my blasters."

"I would say so. Mandalorians are known for their combat proficiency," He responded with a nod of approval before looking at me. "I suspect you are in the same boat?"

"In a way, yes, though my armor is better," I explained with a smirk, ignoring Sabine's growl. "Oh, and my magic."

"Magic?" He asked with a raised eyebrow, looking over at Ahsoka. "A Force sect?"

"I'm afraid not," Ahsoka admitted, shaking her head. "As far as I can tell, it is true. What Deacon can do is magic, or at least is as unexplainable as magic would be."

"Truly?" He asked, not sounding convinced, turning to look at me. "And, would you mind putting on an example so we could see for ourselves?"

"Of course, I would love to."