

I quickly climbed the entry ramp into the shuttle, picking up speed as I did. As I stepped into the ship, the ramp started sliding up, the internal systems already working overtime to clean out the horrible poison in the air. I looked around and immediately rushed through the [interior](#), making a beeline for the cockpit, where Tatnia and Vaz were already waiting. They were sitting in what I assumed were the pilot and copilot seats, Tatnia already tapping on the controls. I stepped in behind them, dropped the lightsaber into one of the other seats, and put my hands on their shoulders, casting healing hands on them both.

Tatnia let out a sigh of relief as the healing energy fed into her, stopping for a moment before continuing to familiarize herself with the ship, Vaz doing the same beside her. When my well of Magicka was empty, I sat down in one of the chairs to wait for it to regenerate.

"Can you guys fly it?" I asked, watching them work. "Because if you can't..."

"I can fly it," Tatnia assured me, Vaz nodding in agreement. "Just don't expect anything special."

"I am not overly familiar with Sienar Fleet Systems ships, but we will manage," Vaz added, her screens flashing a few times.

I nodded, reaching forward and starting the healing hands spell again, once again emptying my mana into them both. Not long after I was empty again, Tatnia looked back at me.

"Stay sitting for a bit. It might get a bit bumpy," She said before turning to focus on her controls.

The shuttle slowly lifted off from the ground, wobbling just a bit before Tatnia regained control. Once she was confident, she aimed upwards, and we were off, heading for space at a pretty fast pace. Once we broke the atmosphere, I could see plenty of ships in orbit, most of them cargo vessels of some kind, before we flew past even them.

"Free and clear?" I asked, Tatnia nodding without turning away from the viewport, which showed nothing but stars.

"Looks like it, Boss... Now we just need to use the Hyperwave to contact the others. Set up a meeting place somewhere."

"Yeah, about that... How difficult would it be to listen in on a Hyperwave?" I asked. "Specifically from the sender's perspective, like if you had access to their ship?"

"You think someone was listening in on whatever that guy was?"

"I think that the Empire is a hive of scheming, betrayal, and power plays, and the Emperor is the worst out of everyone. The Inquisitors, as far as I know, are his own personal

Jedi hunters," I explained. "The likelihood that he bugged their ships to better manipulate them is very much not zero percent."

"God's dammit... okay, we plot a course to deep space, make the jump, and I will take a look at the Hyperwave unit. If it's standard... I might be able to spot anything weird attached to it," She admitted, not sounding very confident. "But that's about all I can do, and it's a stretch. We could fly this somewhere and abandon it if you're that worried about it?"

"No... we just can't take it anywhere important or say anything critical until it's been gone over with a fine tooth comb."

The computer set to work, quickly spitting out a short jump to the middle of nowhere while I continued to heal my two crewmates. By the time they were both feeling completely healthy, we were secluded in deep space. Tatnia and Vaz, the latter of which had some training in spotting plants, trackers, and bugs, checked out the Hyperwave transmission unit, which was set down inside a maintenance space. At the same time, I started going through the cargo, looking for anything suspicious.

Most of the cargo space was empty, save a few crates of what looked like standard survival gear, an emergency kit and some basic rations. There were also five spare sets of stormtrooper armor, including the body suits that went underneath. There was another crate of standard E-10 blasters and other standard gear. The rest of the cargo space was empty.

By the time I was done going through everything, relatively confident there wasn't anything secret in the cargo crates, Tatnia and Vaz had just about finished inspecting the Hyperwave unit. I leaned over the maintenance hatch, extending a hand down to help Tatnia climb out, and was about to do the same for Vaz when she simply jumped up and out in one impressive leap.

"So, we couldn't see anything," Tatnia said, rolling down her sleeves and wiping a spot of grease off her cheek. "Doesn't mean there isn't something internal... but it's the best I can we can do for now."

"Alright, well, let's put together a message, tell them to meet us somewhere," I said. "Somewhere random."

All three of us headed back to the cockpit and put together a message, sending it out through the Hyperwave transceiver. Depending on where they were, it could take hours or minutes for them to get it. We settled in to wait for a response, all three of us closing our eyes to nap. About an hour and a half later, we got a response, a message that agreed to meet us but changed where we had suggested meeting, instead telling us to go to where "Boss had his first space walk."

"The moon?" I asked, furrowing my brow as I tried to recall where the moon had been. "What did he call it?"

"Point Thirteen. They are lucky I remember where it was," Tatnia said, shaking her head as she started working on the hyperdrive controls.

"Is going there a good idea? It was... already in use as a hand-off point, right?"

"Our friend said it was dead, they stopped using it after his original team was hit since there was a chance they could interrogate the information out of any survivors," Tatnia explained. "It's just an empty system now."

The astronavigation system started the process of calculating the hyperspace jumps while I walked back into the passenger area, grabbing the double-bladed lightsaber as I went. I dropped down into one of the less comfortable passenger seats, examining the weapon in my hands. As far as I could tell, it carried none of the dark twistedness that had come off of the Inquisitor, hopefully meaning that it wasn't infected by the dark side. The weapon was sturdy and well-built, feeling solid in my hands. It was obviously well-maintained, and carried the feel of a weapon, the same as when you pick up a blaster or a gun.

Which did nothing to change the fact that it looked fucking ridiculous.

"Really scraping the barrel for new lightsaber ideas," I muttered to myself, shaking my head as I studied the buttons on the interior hilt. "Solid big scary bad guys, relying on a gimmick to take down anyone."

For a long moment I debated activating the weapon, wondering what the chances were that it was trapped. The lore around lightsabers varied from case to case, but there were stories and instances that clearly communicated that a lightsaber could do significant damage if it was broken and activated anyway. Turning on one that was deliberately booby-trapped while I was holding it sounded incredibly stupid.

"Fuck it, not worth the risk," I said, shaking my head as I put the weapon down on the seat next to me, leaning back and closing my eyes.

I drifted off almost immediately, completely missing the eventual jump to hyperspace. I slept for almost five hours before finally coming back to consciousness. I sat back up, my back aching from the barebones and rather uncomfortable seat. As I stood and stretched, I quickly healed away the ache before making my way back up to the cockpit.

"Are we there yet?" I asked, Tatnia turning her head to look at me.

"No, not for another six or seven hours," She said.

"Right. Well, are you two hungry?" I asked, gesturing vaguely to the back of the ship. "There are some shelf-stable food packets tucked back in the cargo area."

I ended up going back into the cargo space and returning with an armful of food, the three of us cracking a few open and digging in. I was impressed by how good the shelf-stable, sealed and self-heating food was, even if it was noticeably not fresh.

They even came with a little candy bar at the end, some sort of sweet nut bar that vaguely tasted like hazelnuts and cherries. I knew stormtroopers lived off some sort of horrible nutrient paste, so they must have been added by the Inquisitors.

When we were done eating, we settled in for a long flight, Vaz and Tatnia taking turns napping as we cruised through hyperspace. When we finally arrived at our destination, all three of us were on high alert. We were pretty sure that whoever had messaged us was, in fact, the rest of the crew, but it was hard not to be nervous. After the gauntlet the three of us had just gone through, I couldn't exactly condemn my rising paranoia.

After dropping out of hyperspace, Tatnia oriented the ship toward the vaguely familiar moon, setting a decent pace. When we were about three-quarters of the way there, the *Talos Chariot* emerged from behind the moon's curvature, burning rubber to get to us. Both of raindrops dropped from their connections and zipped across the distance, encircling us.

"*Dark Blade*, this is the *Talos Chariot*," Calima's voice said, coming through the comms system. "Power down weapons and engines, then prepare to be boarded."

"Wait, this ship is called the *Dark Blade*?" I asked in surprise. "What a bunch of edge lords. We are definitely changing that if we decide to keep it."

"*Talos Chariot*, this is *Dark Blade*, powering down now," Tatnia responded, tapping her screen, whole sections going dark as she did. "It's good to hear your voice, Calima. How is everyone?"

The comms were silent for a long time before it finally crackled back on, another familiar voice coming through.

"Tatnia! It's you! Are you okay!? What happened?! Is Deacon there? Is he okay!?" Miru asked at a breakneck pace. "Where have you guys been? How did you escape!? Where- Oh... Nal says to put your wings up so we can dock!"

"It's good to hear from you too, Miru, Deacon and I are both fine," Tatnia explained with a smile. "We can tell you what happened when we dock. Oh, and we have a plus one, a new crew member."

We could hear Miru taking a breath to start talking again, only for Calima to cut her off.

"Miru, go help Nal set up the docking connection, you can talk to them when they come through," She said, the young mechanical genius whining but leaving with a happy goodbye. "Okay, Tatnia, since I assume you're the one piloting. Go ahead and turn your engines back on, you're going to have a much easier time maneuvering into place than me. Leave your weapons off for now, though, in case someone is holding a gun to your head."

Tatnia agreed, and slowly, we began to move again, orienting to the bottom of the Chariot, moving until we were essentially belly-to-belly with the much larger ship. After a few minutes of careful maneuvering and assistance from secondary cameras and auto-guidance systems, the extended docking systems connected, and the magnetic clamps on the *Blade's* landing struts locked onto the bottom of the *Chariot*.

All three of us stood from the cockpit and made our way to the interior of the passenger hold. It took us a few minutes to remove the floor panel that covered the emergency docking system on the bottom of the ship, but once we did, we opened the circular entrance, revealing Nal, Miru, and Julius, all looking down at us...

While we looked down at them.

"Woah... that's trippy," I said, shaking my head. "How do we cross over?"

"Kneel down and give us your hands," Nal said, leaning over and offering his own. "We will guide you through."

One by one, we kneeled down, letting the others pull us through, shifting from one plane of artificial gravity to the other. To say it was disorienting would be an understatement, but we recovered pretty quickly. Nal slapped me on the shoulder with a smile, showing off his sharp teeth.

"Welcome back, Boss," He said while I shook Julius's hand.

"It's good to be-" I started to respond, only for Miru to switch from giving Tatnia a hug to giving me one, not holding back in the slightest. "Miru, it's good to see you. I'm sorry we worried you."

"Wasn't worried," She said, keeping her head buried in my chest. "I knew you would come back eventually."

"Well, I appreciate the vote of confidence," I said, returning her hug, before giving Nal a look. "How has it been on this side? Everything going alright?"

"We were trying to find you," He explained. "But had no leads beyond knowing you were taken by bounty hunters, not the security force."

"Probably because it was a bounty put out by Jabba the Hutt," I explained, chuckling when Nal's eyes widened. "Yeah, it's been a trip, my friend. Unfortunately, we have some business to take care of before we can sit down. The *Dark Blade* is an Imperial ship, the property of one very dead Inquisitor, the Emperor's Jedi hunters. I don't know if we are keeping it or not, but it needs to be cleared of booby traps, bugs, taps, and everything in between."

"Emperor's... Well, you did warn us the Empire would come looking eventually," Julius said. "So, what, are you guys wanted now?"

"I don't know. The Inquisitor claimed he kept my existence under wraps," I explained, shaking my head. "He was hoping that I would join him, teach him my methods."

"He hid your existence?" Nal asked.

"He tried to. I'de say we are on a time limit now, we-"

"Boss?" Tatnia said, nodding towards Vaz, who was looking around the interior of the ship.

"Right, sorry, Vaz. Guys, this is Vaz Stross. She helped us escape, and stuck with us along the way," I explained. "I offered her a spot on the crew, and she accepted."

"Oh, well...welcome to the show," Julius said with a smile, reaching out and shaking the Shistavanen's hand.

"Thank you. I look forward to working with everyone."

"Lots of fun things to look forward to," I agreed with a smirk. "But first... we need to know if anyone is listening. Miru? Are you up for it?"

"Yeah, just let me get Racer and Leddy," She said, finally pulling away from our hug, heading down to her workshop. "But you are telling us everything while we work!"

"Alright, alright. Let me take a sonic shower and get Vaz situated first, okay?" I said before looking at Nal. "Leddy?"

"Prime repair droid, the one we aren't wiping," He explained. "Just starting to show the first signs of divergence. Not much, asked for a different paint job."

"Gotcha. Well... C'mon Vaz, let's go get you a room, introduce you to Calima, our pilot, and see about finding you some more comfortable clothes," I said, getting a serious nod from our newest crewmate. "Nal, any chance you could..."

"Got a small pile of extra cloths in cargo hold... might have something she can wear," He responded, walking the same way Miru had left. "Good to have you back, Boss, Tatnia."

"It's good to be back!" I called after him before turning back to Vaz. "C'mon, rooms are this way. I'll give you a bit of a tour."