

Luke returns home

The X-Wing touches down lightly just outside Anchorhead. It is much closer to his Uncle's farm than the Mos Eisley spaceport, with fewer prying eyes. It feels like it has been a lifetime since he last felt Tatooine sand under his feet even though he escaped with the droids only weeks ago.

"Stay here Artoo," he says to his faithful droid.

He isn't sure what drew him back. He spent his entire life trying to get off planet but for a few days he has been feeling, well something. Luke isn't sure if he wants to remember a different time or keep a tie to who he once was.

His hand trails along the lines of his fighter as he walks toward the desert town. It is an absent minded gesture. Something he does during preflight checks. As if being in physical contact with the ship will make him more attentive or creates a bond with it. He remembers how smooth it felt before that first mission. Now there are minor abrasions, pock marks from Death Star debris or blaster burns. Little damage that can only be felt when passing the bare hand over it. Nothing that affects performance but still the difference is noticeable to the pilot.

The exterior changes on his X-Wing reflects his interior changes. Standing back, you wouldn't notice changes in the man or his machine, but upon closer observation someone might notice neither are the same as they were a month ago.

It is just after midday on Centaxday, so his friends should be relaxing in the Anchorhead Cantina. Reconnecting with old friends is just what Luke thinks he needs. He could not be more wrong.

Before his eyes have a chance to adjust to the dark tavern a voice calls from across the room, "Luke!"

Blinking to try and help his eyes adjust to the lighting, Luke scans the room looking for the face that belongs to the voice he recognizes. His eyes adjust just in time to see a familiar face rush up and swallow Luke in a huge embrace.

"Bolo," Luke exclaims, the sudden attack throwing him off balance. With his arms pinned to his body he can only pat his friend on the side.

"Good to see you blondie," Bolo says setting Luke down. "Come on, the gang will be happy to see you."

Bolo puts one arm over Luke's shoulder and leads him across the room. Signally to the bartender as they pass for one more glass.

"Who else is here," Luke asks sheepishly.

"Jalaro, of course," Bolo states then stops and turns Luke to face him. "Did you know Tartier and Limaya got together?"

"Uh, no," Luke replies.

"Must have been after you left," Bolo shrugs. "Lim wasn't going to wait around for you forever."

As they continue their journey to the table, Luke contemplates what Bolo meant about that. Limaya had always been friendly to him, but had she been interested? He wonders what he missed.

His contemplation is interrupted by a sudden shout.

'Well I'll be a Bantha calf,' Jalaro exclaims. "Tartier said you weren't dead but I didn't believe it."

"I told you he saw Luke at Mos Eisley," Limaya says.

"You thought I was dead?"

"Well you gotta admit, things didn't look so good at your uncle's farm," Jalaro says in his defense, "I thought you were vaporized."

"Nope, still here," Luke smiles.

"Of course he is," Bolo says slapping Luke on the back. "No good for nothing Sandies could take out my boy."

Luke is just about to correct them that Tusken Raiders didn't kill his aunt and uncle when Bolo slams a drink into his chest.

"Drink up," Bolo bellows raising his own glass. "The gang is back together!"

"Except for Dagar," Tartier corrects.

"Yeah," Bolo agrees taking a long pull off his drink. "He'll be back on leave again soon."

Bolo turns to Luke, "Speaking of which, how long you going to be home for?"

"I don't know," Luke answers, "I should report back to the rebellion within a few days."

"Oh you a bad rebel now," Bolo teases.

"He sure is, look at the blaster on his hip," Tartier taunts.

"Look what we have here," Bolo says unholstering the blaster.

"Give that back," Luke says.

"In a sec," Bolo says waving him off. "Pretty smooth."

Bolo points it toward an empty wall and aims down the barrel.

"Pew pew," he says before handing it back to Luke.

"Hey, what's that," Bolo asks looking at Luke's belt.

Holstering his blaster Luke sees Bolo pawing at the lightsaber attached to his belt.

"That is my father's lightsaber," Luke says sternly batting Bolo's hand away.

"You think you are a big bad jedi now?"

"I will be," Luke says with a touch of pride, "like my father before me."

"Sure you will," Bolo dismisses.

"So when are you going back to rebelling," Jalaro asks changing the subject.

"I haven't really thought about it, a couple days maybe."

"Too bad you couldn't be here next time Dagar swings by. It would be good to have everyone together."

"Yeah," Luke replies looking into his beer.

"Hey, I got an idea," Bolo exclaims. "Dagar asked me to look after his T-16 while he was gone, want to fly to Beggar's Canyon and shoot womp rats?"

"Yeah," Jalaro yells.

"I'm in," Tartier chimes.

"I'll bet I get more than all of you," Limaya says pointing at the boys.

"Actually," Luke starts, "I don't want to."

"What," Bolo asks deflated, "you used to love shooting womp rats."

"I know, it just doesn't seem as much fun to me now."

Luke unconsciously shudders at the thought of flying in enclosed spaces. Last time he did he lost quite a few new friends.

"So you join the rebellion for a couple weeks and now you are too good to shoot womp rats?"

"No," Luke says searching for the words. "After flying down the trench of the Death Star, flying in Beggar's Canyon doesn't seem like a big deal."

"What's a Death Star," Jalero asks.

Luke regales them with the story of his run on the Death Star. How he flew down the trench and dropped two photo torpedoes into an exhaust shaft less than two meters wide. He leaves out the part of Ben Kenobi talking to him from beyond the grave.

"Wow," Bolo says in amazement, "you are a full on Jedi master."

"Not yet," Luke says embarrassed, "but I hope to be one day."

Questions start to flood in.

"What's it like using the force?"

"How are the X-wings over the T-16?"

"How big is the forest on Yavin-4?"

"What is it like going to hyperspace?"

"Is princess Leia prettier than me?"

“What’s an Aluminum Falcon?”

Before Luke can recover from the barrage of questions the doors to the cantina fly open and Ka’Rin rushes over.

“Guys,” she says distraught and out of breath, “Dagar is dead!”

A silence instantly falls over the group. Then the question barrage starts again. This time asking what happened and how she found out.

“Oh wow,” she exclaims noticing Luke, “I didn’t see you there.”

She melts into his arms. “I’m glad you are here. Dagar would have liked knowing his friends were all together again.”

“Do you know what happened,” Tartier probes.

“The station he was on was attacked and destroyed.”

“That’s horrible,” Limaya says.

“I thought he was going to be on a destroyer after the Imperial Academy,” Jalaro interjects.

“He was,” Ka’Rin explains, “but his work on propulsion systems got him transferred. It was a new station and they needed a lot of people to get it online in time. Something about it being so big.”

“Where was this station,” Luke asks knowing the answer.

“I don’t know,” Ka’Rin answers, “he couldn’t tell me because it was so hush hush but it was new and very big.”

“Could it have been the Death Star,” Limaya asks quietly.

“What’s a Death Star,” Ka’Rin asks.

“Luke was just telling us about it,” Jalero says, ignoring Luke’s discomfort and Limaya’s attempt to hush him. “It was some kind of huge, imperial base that he blew up. Crazy story.”

“Is this true Luke,” Ka’Rin asks, “did you kill Dagar?”

Clearly uncomfortable Luke responds, “I don’t know if Dagar was on the Death Star, but they were about to blow up the rebel base.”

“How do you know,” an upset Ka’Rin accuses, “were you on board the station?”

“I was at one point,” Luke says defensively. “I rescued the princess.”

“What princess?”

Luke tells the group about how he and Obi Wan were on board the Millennium Falcon and was pulled into the Death Star, how they rescued Princess Leia, made their escape, and gave the stolen plans to the Rebellion.”

“So let me get this straight,” Ka’Rin furiously states. “You meet up with Crazy Old Ben in the desert, get on board a smuggler’s ship, free an imperial prisoner, then join a bunch of rebels to blow up an imperial space station with millions on board because a crazy old man and convict said they were bad. Did it ever occur to you that they were the bad people and you helped them murder millions of innocent people including our friend Dagar.” Emphasizing the “our” to not include Luke.

“But they blew up Alderran.”

“How do you know? You weren’t there. In fact, you had never been off this planet, I’ll bet you had never heard of Alderran before. For all you know it could be the delusion of a crazy, old man. Or maybe the rebels blew it up and the Imperial Navy was going to investigate.”

“But the princess said it was her home planet.”

“The princess, the princess,” Ka’Rin screams growing ever more agitated. “You had never even heard her name. In fact, the first time you met her she was in a prison cell. Do you ever stop to think that maybe she was there for a reason?”

“But Obi Wan said she needed our help.”

“Obi Wan? You mean the crazy old hermit that lives in a cave? The guy that we are told to stay away from? The one that hasn’t been off the planet in who knows how long suddenly wants to leave his cave to rescue a princess he has never met and give stolen imperial plans to the rebels? That is the guy you are talking about?”

“He was a Jedi,” Luke says trying to defend himself.

“Oh great,” Ka’Rin says sarcastically. “He was a Jedi. Aren’t they the ones that created the clone army that almost bankrupted the Empire? And didn’t they turn on the Empire and try to kill the emperor? So you trusted a known oppressor and traitor to fight the Empire. That makes you a traitor too.”

“I am not a traitor,” Luke says through gritted teeth.

“Hey everybody,” Ka’Rin says addressing the bar, “we got a bone fide rebel here. He killed one of our own because some crazy desert hermit told him to. But don’t worry, he isn’t a traitor just because he acts like one.”

“I am not the bad guy here,” Luke fumes, “the Empire is.”

“Didn’t he want to go to the Imperial Academy to fly,” Limaya whispers to Tartier.

“The Empire you say,” Ka’Rin mocks, “you mean the people that brought peace and stability to galaxy? The people that created an academy and trains young patriots like Dagar? The one that employs billions of people? What does the rebellion do? How many jobs have they created that don’t involve raiding imperial convoys and blowing up bases?”

“Leia was on a diplomatic mission when she was captured.”

“You mean spy mission,” Ka’Rin corrects sternly. “Diplomats don’t carry stolen plans for sabotage but you know who does? Spies! Besides, I thought you said she was a princess. So which is it? Diplomat, princess, or the more likely, spy?”

Luke just stares into his drink. There is no way he can get them to understand. They didn’t see Darth Vader kill Obi Wan Kenobi. They doesn’t know what it is like to feel the universe through the force and make an impossible shot. He can’t explain that when the Death Star came to Yavin-4 it was not to negotiate but to destroy them. He had talked to members of the rebellion, not them. He heard their stories and knew why they joined. He knew that the Empire was bad but how could he ever make them understand? And hadn’t he been just like them a month ago? Naïve kids from a backwater, forgotten world with no imperial presence. They were all happy to stay here and be moisture farmers, only he and Dagar wanted to do more but Dagar made the wrong choice. Not on purpose, it is what Luke would have done had he not come across those droids. It is like it was destiny.

“My professor at U.T.A says that if the rebels stopped fighting the Empire then the Empire could start putting more resources into reconstruction and world building,” Limaya says interrupting Lukes contemplation.

U.T.A, the University of Tatoonie at Anchorhead. The local university. Luke thought about going but talking about new ways to extract water from the desert for four years didn’t seem that interesting to him. You pretty much know all there is to know about moisture farming in the first year so the professors spend the rest of the time filling young heads with their own view of the universe and seem to think the authority of their position makes them an authority on everything. Far too many students regurgitate what they hear in class without doing any thinking for themselves.

Luke can’t help but roll his eyes. It is easy to talk about a war you aren’t fighting. Things are much less academic in the cockpit of a fighter.

“How many of the people on that space station were like Dagar,” Ka’Rin asks. “Just normal people doing a job? Or providing for their family? Dagar said he would send what he was paid home to help his folks, who is going to look after them now? Your precious rebellion?”

Thinking of the loss of a close friend starts to weigh on the young Ka’Rin.

“They were just doing their jobs, and you murdered them,” Ka’Rin accuses through tear filled eyes.

“What should I have done,” Luke asks defensively, “Should I have let them blow up more planets and kill billions?”

“Did you try to disable the weapon? Or did you go right to mass murder?”

“How could I have done that? It is a massive station and I wouldn’t know where to start.”

“Didn’t you have the plans?”

Luke looks at her quizzingly.

“You were in possession of the plans for the space station right,” Ka’Rin asks clearly leading somewhere.

“That was the whole purpose of your grand adventure. You were onboard the station, disguised as

storm troopers, you could have used the plans to lead to somewhere to sabotage the main weapon. Or did you only think of mass murder?"

"I, I didn't think to..."

"That's right," Ka'Rin interrupts, "you didn't think. You are just a simple farm boy that couldn't wait to go off and fight in space. Doesn't matter if you were right or wrong, as long as you got to blow something up. Too bad millions had to die so you could feel like a great hero. How does it feel? How does it feel to be a great hero to the rebellion?"

Suddenly, the medal in his pocket seems like a bad thing to bring out and show his friends.

Ka'Rin doesn't let up, "You had no business being out there. You are just another war mongering killer."

"The Empire is not innocent," Luke lashes out, "they killed my aunt and uncle looking for those droids."

"Everyone knows that was Tuskin Raiders! They have attacked before they'll attack again. They kidnapped your uncle's stepmother years ago. Maybe if your rebellion wasn't out there murdering their troopers the Empire could focus on protecting people on the backwater worlds. Did you ever think about that?"

"Storm troopers killed them," Luke says dejected slumping into a nearby seat. "Ben said so."

"Why don't you just leave," Ka'Rin asks. "We want to remember our friend Dagar and I don't think having his murderer here would be good."

Bolo walks over and helps Luke to his feet. "Come on buddy, I'll walk you out."

"I'm not a murderer," Luke says softly to his friend.

"I know," Bolos replies nodding. "You're a good kid. Ka'Rin is just upset."

"I know."

"Maybe come back after she cools down."

Luke steps outside, looks out at the vast expanse of brown dirt and dust and realizes he is never coming home again. He glances back at his friend in the cantina doorway and knows his self-imposed exile isn't because of the sand.

As he climbs into his X-wing he says to R2D2 with finality, "Let's go Artoo."