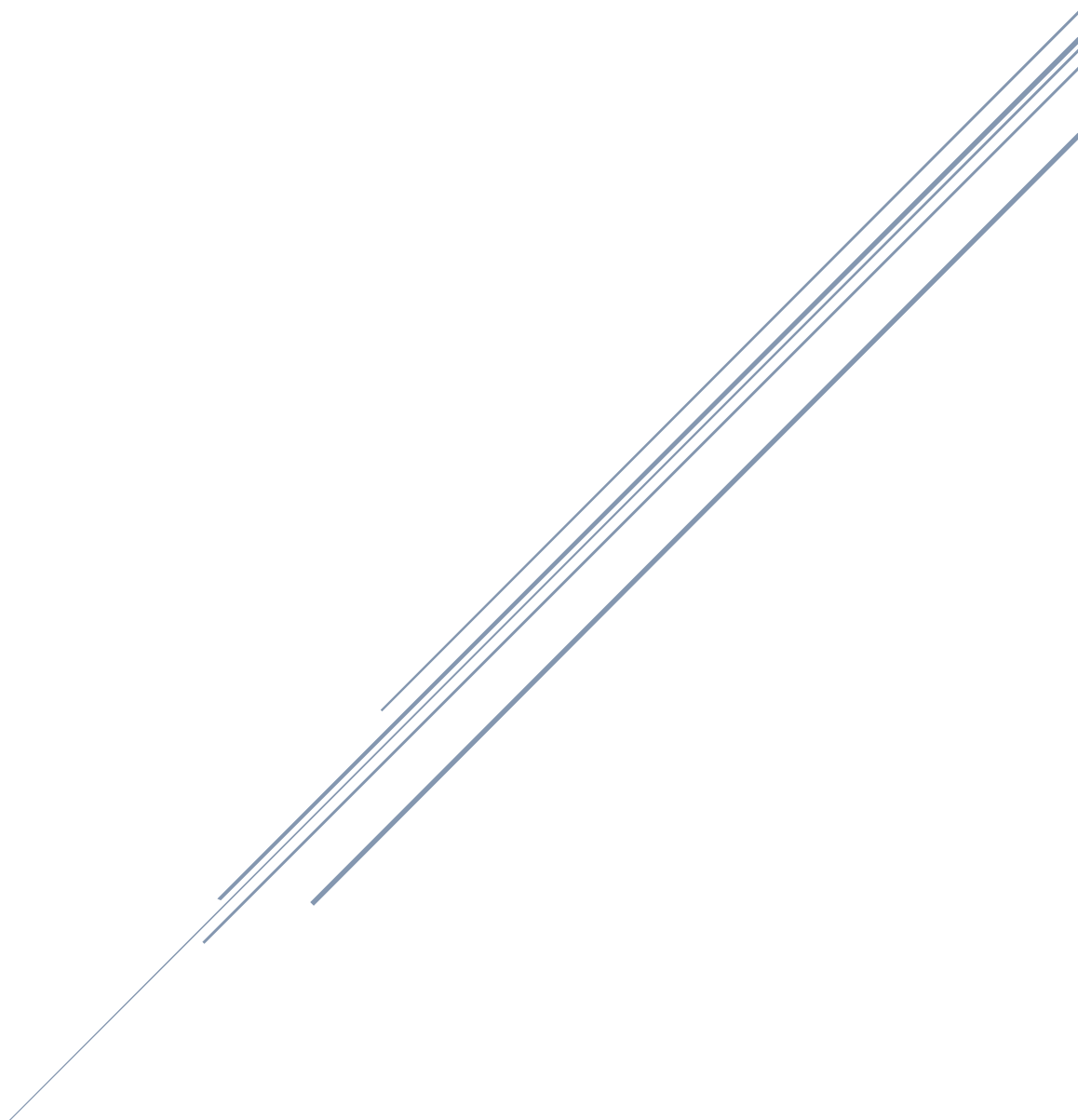


DISCOVERY



Pollus Paratus
#12436

Outer Rim

Pollus was on a reconnaissance mission in the Outer Rim, looking for potential hideouts in case he needed to run. One planet had caught his eyes. Lacking sentient life, it was clear that nobody wanted it.

After doing a scan from orbit, Pollus reconfigured his wings for atmospheric flight. He descended to look at a couple of the more interesting material deposits, conducting more thorough scans on them.

On the second to final deposits, he scans indicated life nearby. He conducted a scan of the deposit and then descended to a hundred meters to check out the life signs. At first, he didn't see the settlement because it was weathered and blended in with the rest of terrain.

Pollus circled back for a closer look. He noticed people. He noticed people holding sticks, pointing it at him. He noticed the spark from one end of the stick before it dawned on him that he was being murdered.

Pollus pushed on the throttle, putting full power in his engine, but it was too late. A second later, the clone war era anti-starfighter missile pierced his right wing and exploded, sending shrapnel through his craft.

The craft was dying. The engines were winding down. The reactor was stressing. The console in the cockpit was flashing in every tone of red and orange. Had he not been going down, Pollus would have been taken by the beauty of the dying craft.

Pushing his awe aside, Pollus worked to give the craft the chance to survive the descent. He pointed the nose down as he worked the flaps to generate more lift at slower speeds. He flared at the last second and brought it in leveled. In a period of three seconds, his craft had gone from a beautiful marvel to a downed bird.

An Hour Later

Pollus groaned, his head throbbing from the crash. He turned his head, his vision blurry, making out vague shapes, including what appeared to be a child, "Where am I?"

The figure moved and a serenading voice responded to his inquiry, "You're on New Aleen."

Pollus blinked and then squinted his eyes, trying to make out more detail on the figure, "New Aleen? Who are you?"

The figure spoke back, "I am Atia. How about you?"

"Pollus Paratus. Why did you shoot me down?"

Atia nodded, "It's nice to meet you Pollus Paratus. But first, how did you get here?"

Pollus was a bit annoyed that his question wasn't answered, "I detected life signs so I came in for a closer look and found a settlement here. The last thing I remember was an anti-ship missile hitting my wing and exploding. Why did you shoot me down?"

Atia looked up at the door and then back down at Pollus, "The clones shot you down. I'm sorry. We wouldn't have if we had known you were Aleena. But we were afraid you were part of the Empire."

Pollus, surprised, spat out, "Clones?!"

"They are descendants of the Grand Army of the Republic. Why, do you know of the Grand Army?"

Pollus gulped, then nodded, "Yeah, they tried to murder me on Coruscant."

Atia didn't believe him, "You're lying. You're not much older than me and I'm 25."

Pollus shook his head, "It's a long story and not one that I want to talk about right now. What is this place?"

Atia respond, "It's New Aleen. It's where we went after the Empire destroyed our homeworld."

Pollus sighed, "I haven't seen another Aleena aside from my brother in 60 years.

Atia was annoyed, "Stop lying. You're not old enough.

Pollus retorted, "Yeah, try me."

Atia thought for a second before responding, "Where did you live?"

Pollus scoffed, "What kind of question is that? We Aleen gave up organization long ago for something simpler. And I spent most of my life on Coruscant because my twin was force sensitive and at the Academy."

The shape of Atia's face became less angry looking, "Are you serious? Do you remember what Aleen was like?"

Pollus moved his head sideways, "Yes, I'm serious and I'm sorry, I don't. I was taken when I was four. The only details I know are the pictures and scarce sources I found in the library."

Atia nodded, "You look tired. You should rest some more. The Elders will want to see you tomorrow."

The night flow without any incident. Pollus slept for a few more hours, his body healing quickly with his fast metabolism. Around midnight, he woke up again and stumbled as he rose out of the bed.

The headache was gone and his vision was back, but his legs still felt weak. After a few minutes of holding onto a handrail, his legs started to work properly. He took a few steps forwards, more confident of his ability to walk and he walked towards the Aleena-size door.

Opening the door, he could see two pairs of legs. Looking up, he studied their faces. There were some resemblances with the clones he had grown up around in Coruscant during the Clone Wars.

The older one looked at the younger one and then looked down at Pollus. "I cannot let you leave. You need to go back in until the Elders request you in the morning."

Pollus pleaded with them, "I just want to look at the stars."

The younger one nodded and then spoke almost passively, "Please, go back in."

"Anton, Darius, it's okay. I'll watch Pollus." Atia spoke from a few steps away, catching the attention of Pollus's two guards. The two guards looked at each other and nodded at Pollus, making a motion towards Atia.

Pollus nodded at the guards and spoke, "Thanks, Anton and Darius," before turning his attention towards Atia, "Hi, nice to meet you again." Pollus stared at Atia, his eyes focusing on her and taking in how attractive she was even under the star shined sky.

Atia smiled, responding to Pollus's greeting, "My pleasure, Pollus. How are you?"

"I feel better." Pollus looked at the stars, gazing at the clear view. While he had this sort of view back at home in Aliso, the stars were different. He pondered on the thought that being in another sector of the galaxy meant an entirely new view of the stars.

Atia looked up for a second and then pointed towards a star, "There's Coruscant." She pointed at another star, "And that's Aleen."

Pollus looked at the star for a second before speaking up, "What happened?"

"Days after the end of the Republic, the Empire came. They were interested in studying Orphne. Things turned bad when they started drilling into the underworld. Kindalo, our friends, were dying in massive numbers as the holes and the air contaminated their habitat.

One day, it was over. Orphne eluded them, the clones, the force users, everything. People who went looking for her came back changed. They were no longer under the brainwashing of the Emperor. So the Emperor sent his enforcer, Vader to bring order to the world.

Vader killed plenty of clones. He slaughtered his own people because they wouldn't go after Orphne. He finally had enough and started killing everyone. Aleena, clone, human, we were all nothing to him.

A group of us ran and hid. There was a clone, Sendai, that we had gotten close to. He was an old soldier, one of the first ones that had been produced and he was stationed there during the Clone Wars. He had liberated a supply barge and was trying to get as many of his men on it. He didn't discriminate against Aleena. We left the planet, escaping through the side of the planet the Empire wasn't patrolling."

Pollus shook his head, "I'm sorry. I wonder what happened to my family."

Atia looked at Pollus, "Well, Paratus is an uncommon name. I spoke to my father about it and he vaguely remembers my grandfather speaking about a pair of twins being accepted to the Jedi and how they fared. As for your family, he couldn't say. I'm sorry, but they're not here."

A Day Later

Atia knocked on the door and Pollus turned to face her. He had been up for an hour and was thinking about his craft and his chances of getting to orbit. He smiled at her for a second and then jumped up when she beckoned him. Following her out of the hut, she pointed at a larger hut that they were going to see the Elders.

Pollus had thought about what Atia told him the previous night and had questions. He started with, "What happened after you escaped Aleena?"

Atia looked at Pollus strangely and then amusingly responded, "I didn't escape from Aleena. My grandparents did."

Pollus looked sheepish for a second before responding, "I'm sorry. It just feels like last year that my brother and I escaped Coruscant. We were in a stasis pod to pass the time on our slow ship until it crash landed on Aliso."

Atia nodded, "Well, Sendai made a few stops at some Republic-friendly worlds where he was able to restock. They also took on more passengers, people who wanted to flee the grasp of the Empire, people who were being persecuted for being on the wrong side of the Emperor.

Then it was a question of where we should go. Sendai thought that the Empire wouldn't come after him and his men if they fled to the Outer Rim. One of the clones recalled a planet that he had scanned in the Starfighter Corps that was deemed irrelevant and uninhabited.

This is the planet that the clone had found and the one that my grandparents came to, where they started to build a life. For the first few years, they had a supply ship drop things off consistently. Then the shipments staggered before stopping and finally, this settlement was forgotten. In the logs, this settlement had some good times and some bad times. Periods of thriving weather and growth followed by periods of bad weather and slow growth."

Pollus nodded at Atia as they came to their destination. He looked at Atia, then at the door.

Atia looked at the door, "The elders will probably want to know what you can do and how you can contribute to this settlement. But they're really good people, no matter how inquisitive they get. Don't be afraid."

A Week Later

Pollus was busy running around and keeping his crews from hurting themselves while making repairs and upgrades to the settlement. A week ago, after he had an enlightening conversation with the Elders, they had given him the resources to implement quality of life improvements.

He first jury-rigged a reactor to produce and refine metals. With his understanding of underground mining and his scan a few days earlier, he had staked an area close to the settlement which revealed to be a rich node of steel close to the surface. Two days with a modified industrial grade laser had produced an access to the ferrite compound, which provided the settlement with the first steel since the Clones dismantled their supply barge sixty years ago.

The aging infrastructure was replaced and repaired, new infrastructure was built for manufacturing purposes, and new tools were manufactured. Machines that had worn out and failed were being powered up for the first time in decades. Pollus showed them how to build rudimentary power generators and droids. Agriculture wasn't the difficult endeavor it had been a week earlier, taking a settlement to maintain and water the fields. The settlement was grateful for his contributions to their lives.

In addition, the remains of his ship had been recovered and he spent his nights fixing and drawing schematics for the parts he would need. As he was creating a schematic for a new wing, Atia came up behind him quietly, making him jump when she tapped his shoulder, "Ooof! Oh, hey."

Softly, she asked, "What are you doing?"

"I'm working on making the craft atmosphere worthy. I need to be able to get this craft off the ground before I can take it into space."

She was silent for a second before asking, "Why? Aren't you happy here?"

"This settlement needs more than what I can offer. We need industrial grade machinery to make it self-sustaining. That requires going off world." Pollus looked at Atia, "Things will get better. Trust me, with a few pieces of equipment, you won't suffer those periods of slow growth."

Atia looked down for a second, her cheeks burning, then looked back up, and giving Pollus a peck on the cheek, "Thanks," before rushing off.

A Month Later

In the month since he started working on his craft, he had nearly all the pieces fixed or replaced. After taking it up for an atmospheric flight with Atia, he felt confident that it was space worthy. He was hesitant about the hyperdrive, but it was as ready as it was ever going to be.

Looking at his craft and running one last round of diagnosis, he looked around him, taking in the beautiful sight of a more smoothly run settlement. When he had first arrived, hardly any equipment was functional and the settlement was slipping to primitive standards. His improvements would bridge the settlement until he was able to come back with some significant pieces of hardware.

Atia walked up to him, her face showing her pain. She looked at him questioningly.

He looked back at her. If anything, he needed to face her, "I need to go. I promise I'll be back. I'll bring more supplies for our people."

"We need you. The last few weeks, you've upgraded our infrastructure more than we could accomplish in years." She was looking for reasons for Pollus to stay.

"I know, but you don't understand. I have responsibilities to Plagueis."

Atia went on the attack, "You also have duties to your people. They don't need you as much as we do."

Pollus sighed, then smiled at her, "I quit thinking of myself as Aleena a long time ago. These few weeks have brought back those feelings. I promise I'll be back."

She argued with him, "You could turn your back on that and live out your days here, oblivious and happy with the meager things we can provide."

Pollus responded, "I can't. There is something far greater out there, something that my soul yearns for."

She sighed, accepting surrender, "Very well. I can't stop you. But I don't want you to go. You're welcome back anytime."

Pollus smiled and pulled Atia close, "I'll be back. I promise."

Atia closed her eyes, "Before you go, the Elders want to see you again. I won't be here to watch you leave. Good bye Pollus."

During Hyperspace

He was in hyperspace and headed towards Aliso. The hyperdrive functioned flawlessly and he wasn't dead yet. He was already missing New Aleen and Atia. New Aleen was beautiful when he took Atia on the atmospheric flight. She was amazed at what the surface of her home looked like.

Suddenly, his seat shook. He was concerned, wondering if his vessel was seconds from tearing apart, leaving him to soar through hyperspace for infinity. There was a violent thump, another thump. The ship was still functioning correctly according to the control console.

Then there was a muffled shout, "Pollus! Are you going to get up?"

Pollus jumped in the cockpit and then climbed off the seat and on the floor of the cockpit. The seat of the bucketseat flew off and Atia's head emerged, "Atia? Why are you here?"

"Pollus, I wanted to see what your soul yearns for... and when you took me up for a flight, it was the most beautiful sight in my life. I don't think I could stick around in New Aleen knowing what adventures I would pass up."

Pollus looked at her, unable to comprehend his stowaway, "Why didn't you tell me?"

Atia crossed her arms, "Because Pollus, you're an overprotective brother and I was afraid you would say no. Now where are we headed?"

"Aliso, Atia. Here, take a look at the controls."