

The two lovers nominally agreeing to work with us was apparently enough for Tatnia to stop with the stoic, silent, threatening badass act. She turned to me expectantly, but when I didn't respond, she reached out, grabbed my arm, and led me away. She pushed through one of the all-glass doors, stepping out onto the small balcony attached to the bedroom.

"What are you doing?" She asked in a hushed whisper, one way to lead to actually be private. "How in the hells do you plan on taking both ships at once?"

"Well... when the shuttle drops off Captain Senita, I will board the IPV," I explained, raising my hand when she opened her mouth to cut me off. "Then I'll wait for him to declare all hands because you guys have started working your way through the *Bayonet*-Class. Once everyone is scrambling around I will kill the stormtroopers and make my way to the bridge, where Captain Senita can surrender. His crew gets confined to quarters, and the captain helps me jump the ship away from the planet to the agreed-upon rendezvous coordinates."

"...You literally just made that up as you went, didn't you?" She accused, narrowing her eyes.

"Uh... pretty much?" I admitted with a wince before raising a hand. "But flexibility and adaptability are important when developing plans."

For a moment, it looked like she would hit me, but she closed her eyes and took a long breath. When she finally released her breath, she focused back on me.

"It's not a bad plan," She admitted, looking like it physically hurt her to do so. "But I'm going with you."

"No, absolutely not," I responded, cutting her off. "The *Bayonet*-class has... How many stormtroopers are on each ship?"

After a moment, I looked over at our sort of captives, sort of allies expectantly. They were both watching us argue, and when I looked over at them through the still-open glass door they quickly looked away like they hadn't been listening in. It took a moment for them to realize I was asking them a question, not accusing them of anything.

"The *Huntress* has a forty-two stormtrooper complement on board, while the *Demanding Fury* has ten," Commodore Distani eventually responded. "Plus, the *Huntress* security doors and several locations around the ship are designed to be difficult to siege. The bridge in particular."

"Exactly. Quadruple the amount of troopers and a much more difficult fight," I pointed out. "The IPV is a much more simple target, one I can handle myself, as long as I have a little help."

I charge a spell and cast it in the corner, a large, armored [Ice Atronach](#) appearing, waves of frigid air flowing off him. It looked good, and I made a mental note to use him more often. The frigid friend was an all-around better elemental than the fire elemental due to its more complex and mana-intensive nature.

"Your constructs fall apart if they take too much damage," She reminded me, looking over at the impressive conjured construct.

"That's their job, to draw focus," I retorted, the conjuration cracking and dissipating in a flow of mana and blue smoke, the construct having worked through its energy since I barely gave it any. "I think we both know I can handle this one ship on my own Tatnia. Have you forgotten what we will be wearing?"

The beskar armor Pola and Vaz had made for us easily doubled or tripled our metaphorical threat rating. We weren't invincible in it, something we would need to work on reminding ourselves, but a group of ten stormtroopers would be hard-pressed to take me down as long as I got to them quickly. Forty stormtroopers, on the other hand, could technically hit the armor enough that it became too hot and failed. It was unlikely unless they brought explosives, but there was still a chance.

"That just-"

"Tatnia, you have too much ship to cover and too many troopers to take down to cut the team down even more. Just four of you is already cutting it too close," I said with a finality that seemed to finally get through to my second-in-command. "If anything, the question isn't whether I should take on the IPV by myself, it's if I should be leaving you guys to tackle the *Huntress* yourself."

Tatnia seemed to back down slightly, my logic and tone finally pushing into her head. I understood that this was a larger-than-average risk, but this was also a golden opportunity to increase our assets considerably. The IPV was a ship that was more or less on par with the standard C70 consular class retrofit. With some extra money invested it could *easily* meet, and maybe even surpass the *Intervention*.

"We don't even have the crew for it," She pointed out, though she had clearly given up convincing me.

"Then we will find the staff, and augment them with droids," I responded, adding a shrug as I continued. "Or maybe we will sell it. Either way, that's a problem for another time. For now, let's focus on the mission and opportunities at hand."

After a long pause, my second-in-command agreed, giving me a nod. Satisfied that I had convinced her, I turned to our new quasi-allies with a smile. I stepped back into the room, Tatnia following behind and closing the balcony door.

"Well, with that settled, how about we move out of the bedroom? I can introduce you to the rest of the team and you can start filling us in on how to best take over your ships," I said happily. "Before, we were going off half guesswork, half rumors, but now you can tell us exactly what to expect."

Begrudgingly, they both agreed, standing and following us to one of the mansion's large dining rooms. It was built in the same clean, angular white style that the rest of the building was, making us stand out in our covering cloaks and disguises. Seeing there was no point in hiding ourselves anymore, I removed my disguise, revealing my uniform underneath. Both of the Ex-Imperial's jaws dropped when the rest of my crew followed suit, showing off our brilliant-looking uniforms.

Over the next few hours, we discussed our new plans, which were ultimately very similar to the old plan, but with the addition that I would be off doing my own thing while the rest of the crew was taking over the *Huntress*. Somewhere along the way, between our uniforms and our professional demeanor, the two officers slowly became more and more open and eager to help. At first, they barely responded to direct questions, only giving the bare minimum information they had to. By the time we were done, they were considerably more helpful.

We spent a few hours planning and going over our plans, but when we were done utilizing our new sources of information, it wasn't even noon yet. We had started all of this so early in the morning, that even after all the time we had spent so far, it was still relatively early in the day. We had a lot of time to kill until the two love birds would have normally returned to their stations, which would be early the following morning.

We were also waiting for another reason. Calima would have left the planet not long after we left to begin the mission, and the longer we waited after she had, the less likely the Empire would be to connect the *Starcaller* to two stolen ships. We were already cutting it close since the heist of Gizer hadn't been that long ago. We would have to give attention to *Starcaller* sometime to relax before using her again.

Either way, we had an entire day to just tool around. For a short while we all were just sitting, doing nothing, and waiting. Then, after about an hour of this, Captain Senita cursed us for interrupting his time off and left the room. He returned a minute or so later in a bathing suit.

"We may be about to turn our backs on years of hard work and dedication, but I will not let that get in the way of my vacation time." He explained, already walking through the house toward the larger deck that ran along the back of the main mansion structure. "We have the rest of the day to enjoy ourselves, and I'm going to do just that."

Distani looked around at all of us with wide eyes before turning to track his partner as they walked out of the room and outside. Once the door to the deck closed behind him, the

Ex-Imperial officer scrambled to join him. Julius and I, the only two who were in the room when this happened, managed to keep from laughing until they were both gone.

Senita's outburst was the breaking point for most of the crew, who began to spread out through the large mansion, exploring and finding things to do. Nal and Vaz took a crack at the kitchen, sampling some of the expensive food, and as it got later, worked together to prepare dinner for everyone. Tatnia and Julius declared they were off to explore the gardens, disappearing for most of the day. I found myself exploring one of the distant structures connected to the main house, finding a library room. It was also clearly the husband's study, and a quick look around revealed a bottle of what must have been incredibly expensive liquor and equally expensive-looking cigars.

I lamented that I could only have one glass and a single cigar, as they were both fantastic.

It was a strange day, like an impromptu vacation mid-mission, ending with a bizarrely friendly dinner, even when Vaz pointed out that she and Nal had made it. It was pretty obvious that both of the officers were more than a bit uncomfortable with the two non-human members of my ground team. From my perspective, it seemed to be less because they thought the Vaz and Nal were inferior and more because neither of them knew how to treat them. Either way, Nal and Vaz both clearly enjoyed making them feel uncomfortable as well, something neither of them seemed to pick up on.

Eventually, we called it a day, all of us returning to separate rooms, of which the mansion had plenty. We traded guard duty, both to keep an eye on our impromptu allies and to make sure we didn't get caught off guard by unexpected guests.

When it was finally time to leave the next morning, all of us piled into the custom-built shuttle, which Racer had kept locked down all night. He greeted us with a warble and whistle, letting out a long whine when I explained the change of plans and introduced our temporary allies.

As Racer and Commodore Distani started the preflight checks for the shuttle, the rest of us donned our armor. Tatnia and Vaz snuck away for a moment to put on their undersuits while the rest of us stripped to our underwear and pulled on our first layer before putting the rest on, piece by piece. We were just about done, pulling on our gloves and letting the armor seal around us, when Senita peeked out from inside the shuttle, his eyes going wide.

"I... Suddenly feel very glad we agreed to your deal," He said. "Who in the hells are you?"

"We are the Skyfired Vanguard," I said, pulling on my helmet, letting it seal to the rest of my armor, the display flipping on, giving me a great view of my surroundings.

"Right... So am I supposed to know who that is or...?" He asked with a raised eyebrow. "Because I kind of expected you to say you were some sort of new-age Mandalorians or something."

Once everyone was ready, we piled into the shuttle. The ship was clearly meant to hold quite a few stormtroopers, most likely to intercept and board pirates or smugglers, so there was plenty of room. They are not the most comfortable of vehicles, but beggars can't be choosers. Once we were all in and set and locked in, the two Ex-Imperial officers started us off, lifting off the landing pad and rising into the air. It didn't take long for us to break the atmosphere, heading directly to the small fleet that was waiting in space.

Up first was Captain Senita and my own drop-off, the IPV. We approached slowly, trading confirmation codes. Funnily enough, the Commodore was clearly nervous about their impending betrayal, but the Captian was cool as a cucumber, calmly responding to hails and feeding his second-in-command the proper day codes.

Since the IPV lacked any hangar bays, a connection was made directly to the airlock of each ship. This was a double-edged sword and the riskiest part of the mission as far as I was concerned. The airlock connection would keep inquisitive eyes out of the shuttle and, therefore, off of the rest of my ground team. Unfortunately, it also meant that my sneaking on board was much more difficult, especially since when the airlock was open, another officer was standing there, waiting for the captain. Luckily, I was mostly hidden around the corner, and the officer's focus was on the Senita.

Thankfully, he kept calm and walked quickly past them, forcing the officer to turn and follow after them, clearly wanting to talk. While they walked further away, I cast muffle on myself and slowly crept through the airlock and into the IPV. I turned and gave Vaz, who was standing on the other side of the airlock, a thumbs up, the canine-esque non-human nodding and sealing the airlock shut.

As the shuttle detached, I could feel the vibrations through the deck, the rest of my crew leaving me alone on an Imperial ship with only one ally. I was halfway through a muttered prayer when I heard a gasp coming from behind me.

I whirled around to find another grey uniformed officer looking at me, his eyes wide. For a moment, we just stared, but a sound coming from further into the ship broke us both out of our surprise. As he reached for his blaster, I raised my hand, hitting him in the chest with a Calm spell. He relaxed slightly, his blaster sliding back into its holster.

"What are you doing here?" He asked, more curious than angry under the effects of the spell.

"I'm just here to check your airlock controls," I assured him, gesturing back at the heavy-duty, vacuum-proof door. "Actually, could you give me a hand?"

The officer gave a put-up-on sigh before nodding. I politely asked him to climb into a nearby locker, which was just big enough for him to stand in. After the fourth time applying the calm spell, I finally pulled my own blaster out, pushed it up under his armpit, and shot him with a stun blast, using his body to mostly muffle the sound. I then closed the door on him, hiding the evidence.

With my cover at least temporarily saved, I opened another locker, this one significantly larger, and climbed inside, just barely fitting in with all of my armor. I carefully shut the door behind me, letting out a long breath as I was swallowed by darkness, only for my helmet to compensate until I could see relatively well. Now, with a hidden spot secured, all I could do was wait.