

After Nal and the troopers returned from their scan through the hallways around the hangar, I left him in charge. With him keeping an eye on the hangar, I went up to meet with the rest of the crew and to meet the pirates' captives. It turned out that a large chunk of the ship's crew quarters had been converted into prison space, which made me think they were likely selling their victims into slavery. It certainly explained how they were so successful. Trafficking slaves was a lucrative business.

When I finally found the victims, Tatnia had relocated them to the area outside the bridge, where Lieutenant Rider and two of his men were keeping watch. Most of them were in decent shape, save a couple of scrapes and bruises. Two of them, however, were looking pretty rough, bearing the wounds of recent and older beatings. I approached the group slowly, taking my helmet off to greet them.

"Hello, my name is Deacon Roy," I said, gesturing to Rider and his men. "I'm in charge of these folks. I understand you guys are recent victims?"

"They captured us two days ago," one of them explained, a woman who was tending to one of the heavily beaten victims. "They damaged our ship and forced us to power down... They said they were going to sell us...Thank you for saving us."

"I'm glad we managed to get here in time," I said, wincing as my suspicions were confirmed. "Why don't you let me help with that?"

I stepped forward and put my hand on the man the woman was tending to, casting Heal Middling Trauma to fix an obvious broken hand. The woman gasped, her eyes wide as the man's wounds quickly closed. I got the man mostly back to good health before moving on to the second, a muscular female Twi'lek with blue skin and old scars along her arms and shoulders. When I was done, having spent my mana three times to get everyone back up to perfect health, I looked over at the first woman.

"Why were these two the most beaten up?" I asked, gesturing to the now-sleeping pair.

"Dialu and Nyriam are the Captain and second in command," She explained, dabbing a tear from her eye. "They would... insult the guards to keep their attention away from us. Sir... what did you do?"

"Just a little magic," I said with a smile, standing up and looking at the other crewmates, nodding to them. "I want you all to know you are safe now. Your ship is in the hold, and while it's in bad shape, I'm sure we can come up with something."

"We... never thought we would get out of here..." One of the crew admitted, sitting down heavily on the floor.

"I can't imagine what you went through," I admitted. "For now, you should rest and recover. When your captain wakes up, ask one of my men to alert me. We can talk about what comes next then."

After a moment, I gave them a nod before stepping away. They were clearly shellshocked and dazed, unsurprising considering what they had been through. With any luck, their captain and second in command would be able to pull them out of it. As I made my way to the bridge, I realized I was just in time to meet Tatnia as she returned from deeper into the ship.

"What's the news?" I asked, my second in command stepping in beside me as I walked into the bridge.

"We are relocating everyone who's surrendered to their prison cell. It's tight, but I find myself struggling to care," She explained, pausing for a moment to consider her words before speaking again. "This was...too easy."

"Waiting for the other shoe to drop?"

"Yeah. I'm waiting for the ambush, or to find out that the ship is actually a trash heap." She said, wincing when she realized what she had said. "Sorry, shouldn't have said that."

"It's fine, I'm going to get the B2s out to watch for ambushes, and you said yourself the ship looks good," I reminded her.

Instead of responding, she chewed her lip, seemingly unconvinced.

"You're forgetting that, at this point, we are overkill for pirates like these. We are two well-armed and coordinated. Maybe if they had been at full strength, they would have stood a chance, but we wouldn't be here if they had been." I pointed out, and Tatnia eventually nodded in agreement. "How does the rest of the ship look?"

"It needs a deep cleaning, and I would rather sleep on the ground than sleep in any of the beds... but it looks like it's in good condition," She responded. "Boss... They were selling people into slavery..."

"Yeah, I know. Makes me regret telling everyone to accept surrender," I said, shaking my head and walking to the forward viewport, spotting our fleet flying above us.

"I agree, but... What do you think are the chances that we could follow this up the chain?" She asked. "Maybe trick some slavers into delivering themselves to us?"

I turned away from the viewport, my brain going over what she was suggesting. As a general basic plan began to form in my head, I nodded.

"That... is a really good idea, Tatnia," I said with a wide grin, turning away from the viewport to look at her. "Why don't we find out?"

Tatnia smirked and nodded, leading me out of the bridge to where the prisoners were. While we walked, I commed Ahsoka to join us before telling Nal to take some of our team and head over to the gunship and process whoever was inside. Then I told our ships to take turns landing to let some of our B2s out, both to set up a patrol around the ice flow and to patrol the ship's interior. I didn't want any surprises catching us off guard as we waited for the bounty officer to arrive. Though technically, we hadn't called them yet since we didn't want to rush this. We made that mistake once already, and none of us were in a hurry to repeat it.

When we arrived at the prisoner area, I stepped into the room confidently, Ahsoka and Tatnia following me in, though they were a bit surprised. The area was clearly just a whole group of rooms with the walls cut down and some plating put up to reinforce certain areas.

Seconds after I stepped in, the nearest pirate attacked me, trying to stab me with a small, easily hidden vibro dagger. The normally lethal weapon skittered off my armor, barely carving a line on my armor. In response, I slammed my fist into his stomach, folding the pirate and letting him drop. A second pair stepped forward to rush me. Instead, they caught a blast of Sparks, dropping them both as they shook and convulsed. I kept the blast short so it didn't kill them but long enough that when I did stop, all they did was lay there and groan.

"Right, so now that we've established that trying to fight us is useless, why don't you point out whichever one of you is the leader," I suggested, looking around, waiting for someone to respond. When no one did, I continued. "I'll let whoever does it first go, free and clear."

Eight people pointed at a single man, one who had hung back away from us when we first stepped into the room. He scowled at his crew before finally stepping forward. Before he could open his mouth, I pulled my pistol and stunned him.

"Tatnia, you mind dragging him out?" I asked, stopping to watch her grab him by his shirt and almost throw him from the room, following after. I turned to the rest of them with a smile. "In the meantime, I'll escort the eight of you off the ship?"

Some of them looked excited, before one of them realized just what kind of planet they were on.

"We can't go outside, we won't last a minute!" He nearly shouted. "You tryna kill us?"

"Huh... I guess you're right, it is a bit nippy inside," I responded with a faux innocent voice. "Are you sure you don't want to go? I suppose you could stay here, but this is your only chance... C'mon, speak up!"

All of them stared back at me with ugly, angry eyes, none of them volunteering to leave the nice, safe, warm ship.

"Good choice," I said, looking into their eyes as I added that last bit in, staring them down. "In case you get any smart ideas, anyone who causes any trouble gets to go for a walk."

I left the room, only to find a quartet of B2s filing into the hall, ready to take over watching the prisoners. One of them stepped inside the room while the remaining three stood outside. I nodded to the repainted droids, before Ahsoka and I followed after Tatnia, who was still dragging the leader.

"What's this about?" Ahsoka asked with a frown.

"Tatnia had an idea. We could use these guys as a way to set up an ambush for some slavers," I explained. "Depending on how lucky we get, we could be looking at quite a few new ships for the Rebellion."

"What about the gunship?" She asked. "I'm vaguely familiar with that design. It's a solid ship, especially for its size."

"I was thinking about selling it for real short change to the rebellion, with the caveat that it stays stationed at Omega Station, save for emergencies," I admitted. "But I could be convinced to mothball it at the station for when we are ready for a new ship. It depends on what kind of state it's in."

She nodded, and I stepped forward to help Tatnia carry the pirate leader. We stopped at a small break area, tying him down to a chair and waiting for him to come around. While we did that, I coordinated with the rest of the group, making sure that someone had collected the *Brick* and that we had all of the ships clear.

Eventually, the pirate leader woke up, shooting up straight and struggling with the cord we used to strap him to his chair. When he finally realized he wasn't going anywhere, he stopped and looked at us.

"What do you want?" he asked with a simmering anger just under the surface.

"Well, we want you to explain how you contact your slaver partners," I explained, sitting down in front of him. "We figured that with you guys under our thumb, we could sweep up some slavers at the same time."

"You got another thing coming if you think I'm going to help you," He said, sneering at us. "You just ruined *years* of hard work! Why the-"

I cast Calm on the belligerent, angry pirate, immediately pacifying him. Over the next hour, we extracted quite a bit of information on the Falnur Raiders, including how they contacted their slaver partners. When we were done, the pirate leader was confused and exhausted, not sure if he should be terrified of me or furious. Once we had our info, I sent him back to the prisoner hold without a second thought. I then made some calls, putting together a meeting to discuss our options. It took a few hours since everyone was still performing their tasks, but eventually, we all gathered in the massive hangar of our new ship.

"Alright. So, we've got the frequency, got the passcode, and we have a schedule. The slavers they work with were expecting a delivery within the next week or so, meaning that's how long we have to make up our minds and figure out a plan," I said, looking out over the crew, including some people from our other ships, like Calima and, Vakim and Dazem. "Thoughts?"

"What's happening to the Braha'tok?" Nal asked.

"Not entirely sure. It's a nice little gunship, but I'm not looking to invest a ton of money and resources to get it back up and running. How did it look?"

"Like it needs money and resources," Nal admitted.

"In that case, I'll probably be contacting the Rebels and asking if they want it. I'm considering saving the remaining freighter, just in case we need one down the line."

"What about the bounty on the pirates?" Julus asked.

"We are set to receive a hundred thousand for stopping the group as a whole and seventy-five for all of the pirates we captured alive," I said. "We just need to report it to the bounty officer, which we will do once the rebels are in a position to take their new ship away, assuming they want it. "And yes, a chunk of all those credits will end up in everyone's accounts relatively soon."

That got a bunch of cheers, and I smiled while they celebrated. Eventually, I gestured for everyone to quiet down.

"The main topic here is whether or not we go after the slavers," I explained, pulling everyone back to my original topic. "According to what we learned, after contacting them, a transport shuttle and an escort will show up."

"What kind of escort?" Vaz asked.

"According to what we got out of the pirate leader, usually some sort of small cruiser, but he has seen them arrive with a squadron of starfighters. have more than enough equipment to handle whatever they might be able to bring. At a minimum, we get to bloody some slaver scum, but at best, we could make a quick buck taking down the bastards and selling their stuff."

"What happens if we go after them?" Lieutenant Rider asked.

"That's where it gets a little complicated," I said. "We would need to keep the cruiser and the freighters here, as well as clean up the remains of the other freighter, since they will be suspicious if we don't. Basically, this mission would happen before we report the bounty completed and before the rebellion takes their ships."

"Which means they could be damaged in the process," Ahsoka said with a frown.

"It's a risk, especially since if it goes sideways and we get found out, we would certainly not be in a good position." I agreed. "We would have to stay grounded, making us easy targets for whatever ship they bring as an escort. Plus, our fleet would have to move around the planet, meaning there is a time window where we will have no support."

"We could mitigate that risk," Tatnia pointed out, continuing when I looked at her. "We have a perfectly good hangar. Let's put it to use. The *Brick* could stay, and we could offload the raindrops from the *Chariot*, too. They won't do us much good if something big shows up, but they could put pressure on them. Buy us some time."

"If they are playing sacrifice time buyers, I'm not sending someone out in the *Brick*," I responded. "But if it's something like a squadron of starfighters..."

"We could stack the deck even more," Julius pointed out. "The gunship might be grounded until it's finished being repaired, but this bad boy isn't."

The younger member of our ground team stamped his foot on the deck plating for emphasis.

"The whole reason we came here was to find a carrier ship for the V-wings. Why not go pick up some of them? We have five pilots back home, just waiting for the opportunity to fly."

"Huh... that's a good call, Julius," I said, looking over at Tatnia. "We have time for that, right? And could we even fly this ship?"

"We are basically killing time until the slavers show up," She pointed out. "Three days there, three days back. That fits the schedule pretty well. As for if we can fly it... if we get a bunch of people and droids from the other ships, we could."

"... Alright, then that's the plan. We take the ship back to Omega Station, then come back here and prepare an ambush," I said with a nod. "Any thoughts?"

I look around at everyone who stopped by to listen, waiting for anyone to speak up. When no one else did, I smiled.

"Good. Then let's get to work. We have some stuff to take care of before we can leave."