

The prep for our next mission, compared to the last time we smuggled ourselves down to the planet's surface, didn't take nearly as long. A few hours after we arrived, Calima dropped Nal and Tatnina off somewhere in the city and picked them up about three hours later, after they had stolen a large airspeeder. They had a bit of a hard time finding a speeder that was big enough, but once they did, they made quick work of claiming it and hiding it away.

Once they were done, we settled in to wait. Calima ordered a decent amount of supplies and topped off the *Starcaller's* fuel tanks. We also picked up a bunch of stock and materials for Miru. She planned on taking over one of the smaller workshops on Omega Station, one that branched off from the main hangar we had claimed, and she wanted a few extra things to keep there. Like usual, the Skyforged were footing most of the bill, save a few specific expensive tools that she was covering since they were for her own creations.

Filling up the cargo hold of the *Starcaller* took a few days, mainly because Calima was purposely delaying her orders to buy us more time to wait. On the third day of us watching the sky, waiting for the custom shuttle that fit into the *Bayonet-class's* tiny hangar to make an appearance, Vaz spotted it flying over the city. Just as predicted, it landed just over fifteen miles away, on land owned by the Commodore's mistress.

Rather than head out immediately, we waited for the rest of the day, sleeping soundly and waking up *very* early the next morning. Calima ferried us to our stolen transport, which we piled into and lifted off, making a beeline towards the mistress's compound.

Now, during the three days of waiting, we had plenty of time to scout our location. The large chunk of land that the mistress owned was surrounded by four-meter-tall duracrete walls. Inside those was a green oasis, with a pool, a beautiful garden, and meticulously maintained trees and shrubs. The mansion itself took up only a quarter of the compound but was still massive, with several buildings leading to a central structure. Everything save the duracrete walls was done in what I would have called a futuristic minimalism, with cool white surfaces shaped at right angles.

While investigating our target, I did a couple of passes with Detect Life cast, and as far as I could tell, there were no guards stationed at the compound, despite there being an obvious guard house by the front entrance.

We landed the speeder along the back end of the compound, the large trees and foliage making the perfect cover for our air speeder, all but completely obscuring the vehicle. While the sun still hadn't peeked over the horizon, it was already starting to lighten the sky. We were all dressed in our uniforms, obscuring the obviously militant clothes with cloaks and other coverings.

The second our feet hit the ground, we split up. Tatnina and I made a beeline for the main building while Vaz and Julius charged around to come from a separate angle. Nal and Racer both headed for the landing pad along one of the corners of the compound to claim and protect

the shuttle, since it was our ticket to our target. We also didn't know if there was some sort of security watching it, but if there was, the sooner we knew about it, the better.

As we entered the mansion, Tatnia and I started searching it room by room, looking for anything that could screw up our plans. I had Detect Life up, so I wasn't worried about being ambushed by living security, but we were forced to disable any droids we saw since any one of them could call in the cavalry should they see we were holding people hostage.

After searching nearly a dozen rooms and disabling a handful of droids, Tatnia and I finally found our target. A large, luxurious bedroom, with one wall almost entirely open, the entire space oriented for a fantastic view of the compound's gardens. There was a singular large bed in the center of the room, with two large lumps sleeping under the covers. I gestured for Tatnia to deal with the windows while silently dragging a chair over for myself, stopping a few feet in front of the bed. When the large open windows were closed, Tatnia flicked on the lights, and our target and their partner began to stir.

The lump on the left was the first to realize something was up, beginning to shift and look around as the light woke them up. Eventually, they sat up, bleary-eyed and confused about what was happening. It was a black-haired and brown-eyed man with a head and obvious fatigue on his face. When he finally locked eyes on me, his fatigue vanished, replaced by fear and shock.

"Who the hells are you?" He called out. "What are you doing here?"

The lump beside him was now moving, sitting up quickly now that their bedmate was shouting. Another man, with a short redhead and a well-maintained mustache, shouted at me as well. This was the Commodore.

"Huh... well, we are here for him," I explained, raising my blaster as Distani scrambled for the nightstand beside him, prompting Tatnia to step forward with the pistol raised, aimed directly at his head. "Easy now. I know you must be confused, but let's not do anything stupid."

Both of the men settled back down, watching Tatnia as she did a thorough search of each nightstand, removing comms device from both of them. When she stepped back, I finally spoke up again.

"Okay, so before we start... who are you?" I asked, looking at the black-haired man. "We came here expecting to find a mistress..."

"I-I'm nobody," He said. "H-he paid me-"

I noticed that Commodore Distani frowned at the implication of hiring a prostitute, so I shook my head. I raised my hand and cast Calm on the black-haired man, the pale green magic gathering in my hand and launching out to hit him in the chest.

"There's no reason to lie to me, friend," I assured him. "Who are you really?"

"I'm Captain Senita, of the *Demanding Fury*," He responded, with a small smile on his face.

The Commodore's eyes went wide as I cast C, even more so when the Captain answered me fully. He looked back at me, even more pale than he had been before.

"That's right, Distani. You are in over your head, so just do as I say, and everything will be fine," I assured him before looking back at the Captain and re-applying Calm. "What is the *Demanding Fury*?"

"It is the IPV Patrol Craft that is part of Lipsec's patrol fleet," The ensorcelled man explained. "It is made by Sienar Fleet Systems and-"

"Thank you, Captain, that's enough," I said with a smile, giving him a nod before looking over at Distani. "Sleeping with a subordinate? Naughty Commodore, pretty sure that's not allowed."

"What do you want?" He said, focused on me a bit, watching as the Captain shifted from calm to confused and scared as the Calm spell faded. "Whatever you think you're going to do, you are not going to get away with it! The Empire-"

"Alright, calm down, that's enough. You can twirl your mustache later," I assured him, shaking my head. "We are here to take your ship. I tell you that because I want you to know so that you can do everything you can to help us succeed."

"Why would I do that?" He asked, still struggling to keep a brave face.

"Because your survival depends on us succeeding," I explained with a smile. "If we succeed, you live. If we fail, I'm going to make sure you die with us."

He opened his mouth to respond, but rather than let him lift his own spirits with a witty comeback or a statement of superiority, I raised my hand and cast Sparks. While I knew it was a relatively weak spell, visually, it looked scary as hell. Lighting arc from my hand and slammed into the wall between the two Imperial officers, sizzling and burning, sparking and crackling. They both screamed as I held the spell for a long, extended moment, finally letting it fade after I used half my mana.

"Any questions?" I asked, getting rapid, near manic head-shaking negatives from both of them. "Good. Now, let's start off with a few basic questions, like why you are here, and where is the woman who owns this building?"

"We... needed a private place to meet," The Captain admitted, looking rather defeated. "And she is a friend, someone we met while performing our more social duties. She... well, she

saw through us immediately and offered her home as a meeting place. She and her husband leave for a small trip to their vacation home when we come over."

"We purposely spread the rumor that she is my mistress," Distani continued. "The Empire doesn't frown upon its officers occasionally indulging, but if command found out that I was in love with someone under my command, they would demote and separate us instantly."

Despite the situation they were in, the admittance of love seemed to catch the other man off guard. He looked at Commodore with wide eyes, and shifting below the covers made it clear he had grabbed his hand. It was adorable, honestly.

I met Tatnia's eyes, seeing that she was struggling to maintain a straight face. I shook my head, before standing from my seat.

"Alright. My friend here is going to keep an eye on you while I talk to the rest of my team," I said, giving them both harsh looks. "Do not give her any trouble. I would hate to have to demonstrate my other abilities."

I turned and gave Tatnia a nod, stepping out of the room and taking out my comms, selecting Vaz.

"Hey, how's the clearing going?"

"No complications so far, Boss," The Shistavanen responded. "We found a security room deep in the main building, but it is empty. It appears to normally be staffed by at least two individuals."

"That makes sense with what we learned. You're not going to believe this..."

I explained the situation to them, Julius laughing in the background as Vaz relayed the information. I connected to Nal as well, telling him to have Racer lock himself up inside the shuttle so that Nal could join us. I wanted to meet with everyone so we could discuss a shift in the plan.

"So, we now have the captain of the IPV *and* the *Bayonet*," I pointed out. "I wanted to propose a bit of a mix-up. We were concerned about finding a way to make a profit off of this mission while we would be handing over stolen ship..."

For a moment, my crew, minus Tatnia, looked at me, their gears turning until Julius finally seemed to figure it out.

"Boss... Are you suggesting we should steal *both* of them?" He asked, his eyes wide. "How would we do that? We don't have enough people or equipment."

"One, I can use magic to level that playing field a bit more," I pointed out. "Plus, the IPV has a significantly smaller crew. I can handle taking that down by myself. That leaves you guys to focus on the Bayonet class. If we can convince the Captain to give up their codes, I could take control over the entire ship without Racer's help."

"You don't know how to pilot anything." Nal pointed out, stopping my plan in its tracks. "Never mind how to punch in hyperspace coordinates."

"Okay... well..." I trailed off, wracking my brain, trying to work my way through his point. "Well, if I can convince the captain to defect... or at least betray the Empire..."

"Do you think you are capable of doing that?" Vaz asked, sounding skeptical.

"I can try," I responded, turning around and heading back to the room.

When I stepped inside, Tatnia was sitting in my chair, and both of the men were now dressed, sitting on the edge of the bed. They turned nervously, looking at me with worried eyes.

"Alright. So, I have an offer for the both of you," I said, sitting down in the chair after Tatnia stood up. "I-"

"We are not interested in joining the Rebellion," Commodore Distani said, Captain Senita. "It is obvious who you are. The Empire may not be perfect, but the anarchy you Rebels wish to spread is far worse."

"No, well, kind of, but that's not what I was going to offer," I insisted, holding up a hand to hold off his rebuttal. "I was going to offer the two of you, together, two hundred and fifty thousand credits to help us. Then, when we are done, we can help you set up some new identities and maybe get some work done to fool anyone looking for you. You could retire early, buy a ship, a home somewhere. This is your ticket to an easier, slower life, one where you could openly be together."

The first clue that I was on the right track was the silence I was met with. Tatnia managed to clear her face of surprise pretty quickly, but both of the officers looked stunned. I let them collect their thoughts for a moment, before Distani spoke up.

"Why? You can clearly manipulate us into speaking the truth, like you did earlier. Why do you need our willing help?"

"Because. Originally, our plan was only to take your ship, Commodore, and we have what we need to do that," I explained. "But with the Captain here, we have an opportunity to take his ship as well. I want both of them. This makes us a bit tight on a few roles. Namely, someone who can control the ship, pilot it, and jump to lightspeed."

"And why should we trust you?" The Captain asked. "You're just as likely to kill us when you are done than anything."

"If that was the case, you're already dead," I pointed out before shaking my head. "I give you my word that we will not just kill you when we are done. I'm a mercenary, leader of the Skyforged Vanguard, and while yes, we may have Rebel leanings, a mercenary's word is their bond."

The two partners share a look, a long one that you could just tell was an entire silent conversation. Eventually, the Commodore snorted and looked away, shaking his hand.

"I guess my father was right," He said, sounding annoyed but with just the slightest hint of acceptance. "I would end up being an embarrassment."

"He won't get off lightly..." Senita pointed out. "He will likely get in trouble."

"I'm already considering their offer, Seni. Don't make it sound even better."

After a long moment, they shared another look, and this time, the Captain nodded, leading to the Commodore meeting my eyes.

"Four hundred thousand."

"No, I'll go to three hundred, and that's it," I responded, shaking my head. "I'm not cashing out four hundred thousand credits just so you can both press a few buttons. Three hundred thousand is a fantastic start to a new life already."

The Commodore looked at me for a long while before eventually giving me a small nod.

"Fine, three hundred thousand credits... and you keep your weapons on stun."

"We will try our best to take as many of your men alive as possible, including the two of you," I said solemnly. "But I can't promise all of them will make it, especially any stormtroopers on board. Their brainwashing runs a bit too deep to meet them with anything other than overwhelming force."

The Captain snorted, and Distani shook his head.

"Stormtroopers are not my men, they are barely men at all," He explained. "They are men-shaped droids, their thoughts so scrambled they would attempt to clean the hull in skivvies while in space if you ordered them to."

I couldn't help but chuckle, standing from my chair and stepping forward to the edge of the bed, my hand extending. After a long moment, Commodore Distani took it, shaking it once as he stood.

"Welcome to the mission, Commodore, Captian. Things just got a bit easier with you two on board."