

Despite seeming like a no-brainer choice to Nal, Vaz, and myself, I still wanted to see what some of the others thought. As a group, the Skyforged was now just a big too big to be a full democracy, but I still wanted to hear what other people had to say. After all, you never know what sort of stupid thing you missed that someone else will spot immediately.

That said, I was in no rush to get this mission started. Nal assured me the timer on this mission was good for at least a week or two, and I wanted to give everyone at least a few days to unwind and prepare. The rescue mission had been more than a bit stressful, with being under constant threat and dealing with body dysmorphia. Once everyone was rested and recovered, we would start working on the plan.

Over the next few days, I talked to most of the crew about our options. In between that, I was helping Miru set up the docking stations for the fifteen B2s that were soon to be stationed at each ship. It was an easy process most of the time, with our various repair droids doing most of the heavy lifting, while Miru and Racer, along with two other astromechs that Miru had modified similarly with slicing software and hardware, scanning and modifying the droid's programming. Miru already had instructions to start doing the same for every BX in the munificent storage since I wanted as many of them on hand as possible.

I also spent some more time with Ahsoka and Luke, helping them both train and practice their lightsaber skills, as well as offering advice where I could. It was fun sparring with them, being able to use the sword-fighting talents that the entities had begrudgingly given me without actually being in danger. I was still no match for them in pure reflex, but I was able to fight Luke on more or less even ground by filling in the gap with skill.

I would have been thrilled with that achievement if, just a few weeks ago, Luke hadn't been struggling to even consistently tap into the Force. The fact that he was now getting closer and closer to beating me was astonishing. He really was a monstrously talented kid.

Ahsoka usually beat me pretty quickly, at least, she did if we were counting hits against my conjured armor as a strike. Neither of them could beat me if I tanked their strikes for obvious reasons.

When I felt like everyone had gotten enough rest, and after saying goodbye to Leia, Han, and Chewie, I gathered everyone together. I also invited Ahsoka along, though I assured her she was under no obligation to go on the mission with us. I just wanted to give her a peek at what our planning was like. She agreed and showed up at the conference hall just after I had done so.

Of course, this was our full meeting since the group had nearly tripled in size. Unfortunately, the group had just gotten too big for us to have an ordinary all-hands meeting. Instead, we used a sizeable auditorium-like room, with layered chairs around a [central pit complete](#) with a holoprojector.

First, I presented what ship we would be adding to the fleet, going over why we chose it specifically and what we could expect to get out of it. I explained that the [L-2783](#) would allow us to carry two whole squadrons of V-Wings into battle, both of our LAAT's, and whatever other assets we might need. It would also let us seize assets and transport them ourselves, meaning more loot opportunities going forward. I brought up our first pirate raid, where we were forced to sell several decent starfighters at *significantly* reduced prices since we couldn't get the ships off the planet ourselves.

I pointedly didn't mention that the Rebellion had been the ones who practically stiffed us, but Ahsoka still winced.

Once I had gone over the what and why, Nal stood to go over the how, tapping his datapad to start the holoprojector

"The [Hapes Consortium](#) is known for its incredibly harsh treatment of pirates, but its location and separation from the Empire makes it a tempting safe haven for pirate groups that pull a little too much Imperial attention," The Duros male explained. "Quite a few pirate groups set up around its outskirts, jumping back and forth between both sides in order to confuse and escape patrolling fleets, using the [Transitory Mists](#) to prevent further tracking. One such group is the Falnur Raiders."

Nal tapped the controls, the holoprojector shifting to first display a galactic map, the chunk of space controlled by the Hapes Consortium flashing, before the view zoomed in on the highlighted area. I seemed to remember the Hapes Consortium being smaller on maps I had seen before my first life ended, but I shook it off. Either I was misremembering, or it was a shift due to the amalgamation, and neither of them changed anything.

My attention shifted back as the projection shifted again, this time showing the symbol for the pirate group, a bloody knife stuck in the skull of some sort of large, dangerous-looking creature.

"Six months ago, the Falnur Raiders were terrorizing a populated hyperspace lane," Nal continued. "Eventually, the Empire responded, ambushing them and destroying a significant portion of their fleet. Several ships, including their L-2783, escaped, running to the border for cover. Since then, they have been spotted running a few small raids, but mostly, they are licking their wounds."

"The perfect opportunity to strike," I pointed out, Nal nodding in agreement.

"What about the Consortium?" Tatnia asked with a frown. "Are we going to have to worry about them cracking down on us if they stumble on us?"

"Not likely. Hapes recognizes the bounty hunters guild," Ahsoka explained. "They are isolationists, yes, but they aren't necessarily aggressive. However, if we... if we run into them, it would be best if the talking was left to the female members of the crew. Their society is heavily matriarchal and will probably react poorly to being forced to discuss business with a male."

"Right, that's good," I said with a nod, pointedly ignoring Ahsoka's stumble for now. "Though, as of right now, the *Loyal Hound* doesn't actually have any female crew..."

"I will ride with them," Vaz said, raising her hand. "We will most likely end up in the same fight anyway."

"Sure, that works," I said with a nod before looking back to Nal. "Continue."

"According to the bounty, they are down to the L-2783, two smaller freighters, a [Braha'tok-class gunship](#), and a handful of starfighters," he explained.

"We can handle that easily," Julius pointed out with a confident smile. "Even without the raindrops, we have more than enough firepower. Hell, we could leave the *Loyal Hound* behind and still have enough."

"Maybe, but I want to get as much as we can out of this," I said, rubbing my cheek. "Not to mention that my Clairvoyance is next to useless tracking down an actively jumping ship. No, I want to track them to where they are landing. They are landing, right?"

"Most likely. The damage observed to the gunship was too severe to be repaired in a vacuum," He explained, bringing up an image of middling quality that showed the long gunship with several spots of serious damage. "If they want that back up and running, they will have to land."

"Was the gunship spotted in its most recent raids?" Ahsoka asked, getting my attention.

"No, it was not," Nal responded. "Which means it might be landed somewhere, undergoing repairs."

"It's a lot of ifs and maybes... But it's worth checking out," I said with a nod. "All three of our ships are fully staffed and ready to go. The *Loyal Hound* and the *Intervention* are probably more than enough, but I want the *Chariot* on hand so the raindrops can hold off any starfighters they might have up and running. But that's all if things go wrong. What I really want is to catch them on the ground."

We spitballed a few ideas about how we would engage the pirates on the ground and what we would do if we were forced into a space battle before finally finishing the meeting. We had the rest of the day to prepare before we left the following morning, bright and early. With that, we split up, everyone heading out to spread the news, start to prepare, or just catch a bit more downtime before we had to go. I was watching people go when I realized Ahsoka was still sitting, waiting for the hall to empty.

When the last person, Tatnia, left after giving me a look, I finally sat down beside her, staying quiet. After a minute, she finally lets out a long breath.

"I will occasionally have to leave," She said. "Sometimes the Rebellion asks me to help with something or finds something related to the Jedi that I need to tend to."

"You have other obligations. That's fine," I assured her, shaking my head at her assumption. "But if you think you're gonna join up and then head off alone, you're very much wrong. Skyforged don't fight solo unless it can't be helped."

"But... there won't always be a way for you to turn a profit," She pointed.

"Not with that attitude, there won't be," I retorted, before reaching out to squeeze her shoulder. "We have plenty of people now. We can spare some to go with you while the others run smaller bounty missions or scav runs."

"I... Alright, fine. I won't say no to better help," She said after a moment of thinking.

"Good. Now, I assume you don't want to wear our full combat armor?"

"No, it's too much," She said, shaking her head. "For you guy's, it's perfect, but... It doesn't fit us."

"No problem. I'll have Pola start thinking up some light armor variants," I assured her. "something that's more subtle and less imposing."

"I don't-"

"Ashoka, I know for a fact that Obi-wan wore armor during the war, as did several other Jedi," I pointed out. "I don't need you covered from head to toe, but you need a helmet and some light plate to cover your vitals. If you're part of my team, you wear the armor."

"Fine, fine... I won't deny that getting access to such nice armor is hardly a bad thing..." She admitted, before letting out a long breath.

I chuckled and nodded, standing up and offering her my hand. When she took it, I pulled her up until she was standing.

"In that case... welcome to the team."

To celebrate our newest member, I sent a message on the comms to everyone, letting them know she was one of us. We then raised a toast to her at the lounge outside our sleeping quarters block.

Once the short celebration was over, I sent her to Pola, so he could get her measurements. The armorsmith could get to work while we were gone, and in the meantime, she could wear the uniform, which was plenty flexible and durable for now. I hated her not having a helmet, but with her montrals we couldn't exactly just borrow one off the shelf.

The rest of the night was spent preparing and going over the usual maintenance. Armor, weapons, ammo, droids, and everything in between. It wasn't anything fanatic or rushed. Since we took such good care of our equipment, there wasn't much reason to worry about weapons failure or anything like that. But it still needed to be done, so we made our way through it.

The following morning, we woke up with a team breakfast before we all split up and spread out through our ships. The clone ground team boarded the *Loyal Hound*, as did Vaz. The *Intervention* carried an extra twenty B2s and a complement of ten BX units, led by BX-01, whom we now call Boxi. We didn't really plan on using the droids since I was using this partially as a test for our newest ground team and to see how we worked together, but I wasn't about to leave behind resources that might come in handy.

The original ground team, plus Ahsoka, was riding on the *Talos Chariot*, as usual. It was hard to beat the speed and flexibility of our little pocket carrier. With its upgrades and its small team of raindrops, it was the perfect landing craft.

So much, in fact, that I was considering modifying it to fit that role even more. I didn't know if they existed in this universe, but some sort of quick deployment system built into the bottom of the ship, some extra bunks for more troops, and some combat speeders in one of the hangers would make it perfect for landing in hostile territory, deploying assets to cover us and then buzzing out again before it could get damaged.

When we finally left, I knew that I would be spending most of the just under three-day trip locked in the enchanting room. Ahsoka needed at least two more enchantments, and I wanted to get her properly kitted out before we even got close to our destination.

Since she was trained as a Jedi, and they were basically the poster children for agility builds, I figured that two dexterity enhancers would be the best bet. When I eventually got around to enchanting everyone's armor, I would level it out with some strength stuff, but for now, a Jedi with superhuman dexterity, *before* the Force even entered the equation, was a delightfully intimidating concept.

She happily accepted both the amulet and the single ring. We then spent the remainder of the last day sparring so she could get a handle on her new enhanced level of dexterity. Considering I couldn't even touch her, at least without using offensive magic, I was more than happy to consider my job complete.

When we finally arrived near the raider group's last location, we started the familiar process using Clairvoyance to triangulate their position. It took three jumps for us to realize that they must have still been in hyperspace since the Clairvoyance arrow was visibly moving. The movement was so small it was barely noticeable, but it was definitely moving.

With nothing else to do, we stopped in deepspace and waited, several hours in fact, before eventually they stopped moving. Julius helpfully pointed out that they might just be taking a break or stopping for repairs, but after our third reference scan with a difference of five hours, it was clear that they were staying still for now.

It took us the remainder of the day, but we finally narrowed their position down to a singular planet just around the outskirts of the Transitory Mists, just inside the Hapes Consortium territory. With any luck, we would be able to catch them unawares as they worked on their ships.