

Ahsoka and I left the scene of the fight at a jog, looking around and eventually finding an alley to slink away in. We knew that it wouldn't take long for the rest of the Imperial forces to realize something had happened, which meant we were now working on a much smaller time scale.

"We need to find the others," Ahsoka said as we crossed from one alley to the next. "They couldn't have gone far."

I nodded and slowed down as we reached another intersection of road and alley. I quickly cast Clairvoyance, noting where the arrow pointed and that, for now, they weren't moving.

"We need to abandon the part of the plan we were to drive the speeders out from under the Star Destroyers," I added, now leading the way at a quick jog. "We can pilot the starship along the planet and then go up, but we don't have the time to travel by speeder."

"The TIEs are gonna track us that way," Ahsoka warned. "We will probably be able to outrun the bigger ships if we get lucky with what we find, but there's no outrunning the TIEs like that."

"I know," I admitted with a frown. "We don't have a choice, though. Our window is closing quickly."

Ahsoka grimaced but nodded in agreement. We ran for a few minutes before I caught some movement out of the corner of my eye. I stepped out into the road, forcing a passing speeder bike and its rider to slow down. Rather than respond to the shouting and cursing, I cast calm on them before helping them rather roughly off the speeder. I slid back so Ahsoka could drive since I needed to be able to use Clairvoyance.

"I assume you can pilot one of these?" I asked.

"Of course," She responded, hopping onto the bike and immediately gunning it.

We flew for about five minutes before we finally found our friends, their speeders tucked up alongside an abandoned side parking for an old factory. It was sufficiently hidden from prying, casual eyes but wouldn't withstand the scrutiny that was no doubt coming our way very soon. As we came to a stop, Tatnia and Nal both lowered their weapons, realizing who we were.

"Good to see you guys, too," I said with a smirk. "Told you we would be fine."

A light impact hit my torso, and I saw Felia and Claron hugging me. Felia looked relieved but still guilty, while Claron just looked happy we had returned. I patted his head while giving Felia a confident nod, getting a slightly less confident but clearly still determined nod in return.

"Okay, people, we might have taken down a big threat to us, but we also just kicked the hornet's nest. We have minutes, maybe less, until the Imperials realize the big spooky edgelords got their asses handed to them. Once that happens, this whole area is gonna be more overrun than the city was. And that's not even the worst news," I explained, looking up to everyone. "We just killed the Grand Inquisitor, the leader of the Inquisitors. There is only one person who could really be expected to respond to his death. Only one Gran Pappy Pals could send after him.... Darth Vader."

That got a big reaction. Ahsoka gasped about halfway through the explanation, clearly realizing what I was saying as I was saying it, while everyone else saved their curses and gasps for the end. Sheora paled, her eyes wide, and for a moment, I thought she was going to collapse. Darth Vader was at the center of a lot of scary shit for a lot of people, especially the Rebels. To them, he was a real, live boogeyman. Their fear for him ran deep, and in all honesty, I couldn't blame them. I might not hold much reverence for Anakin and the monster he became, but I wasn't dumb enough to doubt his abilities.

Especially since he was part of the prophecy. Who knew what the Force would do to keep that prediction on track. I wasn't about to fuck around with that because I most certainly didn't want to find out.

"There's a starport within speeder range, on the very outskirts of the city," Nal said, looking up from his tablet. Even his blue skin was a shade paler than usual. "Popular enough that there should be a ship there."

"Good. Everyone, pile in," I said, nodding toward the speeders. "This might get rough, but if we work together and stay smart, we can do this. Let's go."

We quickly climbed into the speeders, leaving the stolen speeder bike behind. With any luck, it would be returned to the guy we stole it from, though, unfortunately, I did think it was very likely.

The two speeders that Julius and the distraction team had rented were just big enough to hold all nine of us, as long as we weren't too attached to our personal space. Still, it was better than walking, especially when everyone was still looking for two kids and Sheora.

We arrived at the starport a few minutes after Ahsoka and I rounded up the group. At the tail end of that time, it was clear that the cat was out of the bag and spitting mad. The Empire came down on the area like the wrath of god, with the skies choked with TIE fighters and speeders dropping in stormtroopers patrols by the dozens. If I hadn't known better, I would have thought they were mobilizing for a full-on assault rather than an occupying police force.

Thankfully, with the Inquisitors dead, Ahsoka could fully tap into the Force, guiding us slowly but surely through the city outskirts to our target. She wasn't quite peaking into the future verbatim, that kind of stuff was what *Jedi* legends were made of, but she was perfectly capable

of reading the flow of the Force and guiding us away from conflict. Of course, Tatnia, having grown up on the streets, had been dodging Imperial patrols since she could walk, so she helped quite a bit as well.

When we finally arrived at our destination, we parked alongside the large walled-off space, ignoring the obvious parking spots. All of us, save the kids, stepped out of the speeders, Sheora remaining mostly hidden inside as well.

"So much for getting out of the heavily patrolled area," Julius said with a frown, looking up at the sky, the familiar scream of TIE fighters filling the air. "This is way worse than before."

"It's far from optimal, but we have to play the hand we were dealt," I said, looking up and watching a pair of [Imperial transports](#) fly overhead, escorted by a pair of goddamn *hover tanks*, the [design of which](#) I didn't recognize. "We need to get the hell off this planet before they tighten the noose anymore."

"We need to get off the streets," Sheora pointed out. "If we get into a ship now, we will at least be out of eyesight. Even better, we can wait around for the heat to die with our escape plan already set up and ready to go."

We agreed that getting off the street and into somewhere we could hide was our next step, so together, we moved out. Ahsoka, Nal, Vaz, and Julius swept through the small starport with very little trouble, checking it over for anything that would screw us over. Once we were sure we were not being recorded or that the place wasn't hiding any surprises like a security system, the rest of us moved in.

There were only five landing pads at the small ship berth, only three of which were currently occupied. Two of the landed ships were useless, way too small to even consider, and not just because we had nine people looking to leave. We needed something that could take a few hits, and a rinky-dink off-brand glorified star commuter wasn't going to provide that.

Thankfully, our luck held out on the third ship.

The last berth we checked contained a [YKL-37R Nova Courier](#), a decent ship from a company that Nal assured me was in the process of going under. Still, according to him, it had some decently robust shields, two laser cannons built to fight off pirate starfighters, and *three* concussion missile tubes to fight off their bigger ships. The biggest downside was its relatively small size, but it would do for what we needed now.

Assuming the people we were about to steal it from actually took good care of it.

Ahsoka and I approached the ship first, stepping under the shade it cast. As we did, a man just around my age descended from the boarding ramp. He was scrubbing his hands of oil as he watched us approach.

"Can I help you?" He asked, watching us closely. I could see he had a blaster at his hip, but I smiled like I didn't care.

"I sure hope so," I said, raising my hand and hitting him with a calm spell, the man flinching before calming down immediately. "Is your ship in good condition?"

"Good enough, could use some updated-"

"Good, great, sorry, but we are a bit short on time. Are you in any way connected to the Empire?"

"I'm an Imperial citizen if that's what you mean," He responded with a frown. "I don't work for the government, though."

"That's great. I just have one last question. Do you have any crew?"

"Just me and my copilot droid. She is inside in her charging bay," He answered, his expression going a bit strange as the spell effects faded. "What is going-"

I hit him with another Calm spell, guiding the man back inside the ship while Ahsoka went to get everyone else. I tied the man down to a chair in the lounge area and took away his blaster before looking around the ship to find the man's robotic crewmate. I turned them off with an external switch before returning to the lounge. Tatnia and Vaz entered at just about the same time I did.

"Look, I don't know what you want, but this ship is my livelihood," The man said. "If you plan on stealing her, you're best off just killing me."

"What's your name?" I asked, sitting across from him as the rest of the crew started going over the ship, Sheora guiding the kids to one of the living quarters.

"Yalip," He said, looking at the people exploring his ship, checking out the internals and generally poking around. "Hey, don't touch that! That panel is broken. It takes forever to-"

Before he could finish, the panel that Julius was fiddling with popped off the wall and fell to the ground. Julius winced, but the man cursed, his frustration boiling up, overriding his fear.

"Gods Dammit! Who the hell are you and-"

It was about then that Yalip noticed Sheora and the kids, catching a glimpse just as they disappeared.

"Wait a second... you're the people that they're looking for!" He shouted. "What-"

"Yalip, I understand that this is frightening and unfortunate. Trust me, I'm not happy about this either," I assured him. "But we are out of options. These kids, they've done nothing wrong, and if the Empire catches them... their lives are going to be hell."

"I... then I guess that makes you Rebels?" He asked, his face red, still clearly angry.

"More or less," I responded. "Unfortunately, we need a ship to get off this planet. Normally, I would hate to involve a civilian like this, but the Empire forced my hand. I need to put the lives of my team and the kids before my distaste for harming innocent civilians. Now, if we survive-"

My attempt at honesty, admitting that there were significant risks involved, immediately backfired. The slightly older man paled and stuttered a few times before continuing to yell at me. I didn't blame the guy. After all, he had every right to be upset. The empathy I felt didn't change anything, the lives of my team and the kids came first, just like I said. When the man refused to calm down, I let out a sigh and drew my blaster. I clicked it over to stun, shooting the man in the stomach before shaking my head.

I would try again when he woke up. If we were still around when he did, at least.

It took a few minutes of exploring the ship before finding my way to the cockpit, especially because I didn't expect it to be in one of the nacelles. When I eventually got there, I found Ahsoka sitting at the controls, familiarizing herself with the layout, while Nal sat slightly behind her, working his own console.

"How does it look?" I asked, leaning on Ahsoka's chair.

"Well, the ship is in decent condition, so that's something. Its shields are even upgraded slightly," She answered. "Only four concussion missiles left, which is honestly more than I expected."

I nodded in agreement. Missile ordnance was expensive and rare outside the Imperial supply chain. That was a problem that chased after the Rebels even when they became the New Republic. I looked over at Nal, who was sifting through the sensors.

"What do the sensors say, Nal?"

"That one of the Star Destroyers is starting to move," He responded. "It will be over our position in two minutes."

"Is it charging weapons?"

"No."

"Good. Ahsoka, start running through the preflight checklist. Nal, keep an eye on that ship," I said, getting nods from both of them. "If that starts targeting us, take off and try to get us out of here."

"What are we doing in the meantime?" Ahsoka asked, spinning her chair to face me.

"Waiting," I responded simply, continuing when she gave me a look. "We are going to wait in hopes they loosen the grip they have around us. We can't wait too long, because I really believe that the next person on the way is Vader. But the situation might improve with time."

Ahsoka chewed her lip and turned back to the controls. I could practically feel her unease, the idea of her former master showing up really throwing her off. I reached forward and put a hand on her shoulder, giving her what I hoped was a reassuring squeeze. She put her hand on mine, turning to look up at me. I gave her a nod, getting a small smile and a nod in return. After a moment, I pulled away, leaving her and Nal to their work.

I made my way through the ship, looking for Tatnia since she was more or less heading the investigation of the rest of the ship. I wanted to fill her in, explain my reasoning, and, with any luck, find something to do to kill some time. I might be hopeful that the situation would shift in our favor if we gave it enough time, but that didn't mean I was looking forward to the wait.