

We moved around the city, eventually making our way to a halfway decent vantage point, an abandoned landing platform for airspeeder, connected to an even older building. It overlooked a considerable amount of the warehouse district, including the abandoned warehouse where our target was supposed to eventually appear. As we settled in, all three of us, Vax, Nal, and myself, did our best to seem inconspicuous. Even with how late it was, the Imperial patrols didn't slow down in the slightest, both on the ground and in the air. Two of us took shelter under an alcove along the building, out of sight from everyone not at our level. Every few minutes, done randomly to keep from being obvious, we switched out so only one person was out at once.

Technically, we weren't the primary lookouts, we were just overwatch, keeping an eye out for encroaching patrols, and worrying crowds. The honor of being the primary lookout and potential contact maker belonged to Ahsoka, Julius, and Tatnia. While I would have preferred to be in the thick of it, it made sense that Ahsoka made the first contact since she had a lot of experience with this sort of thing. She even knew the passcodes and word phrases that would help identify her as a member of the Rebellion.

Silently, we waited, the night slowly passing by. Judging by just how active Imperial forces on the planet were, the Rebel and her charges were still at large, meaning it was up to us to find them before the Inquisitors did and get them off the planet.

After about ten minutes of watching, it began to rain, and pretty soon, a steady fall of water soaked us to the bone. Around two hours in, during my turn, I saw a flash of color walking toward our surveillance target. I motioned toward Nal, who stepped out of his cover and pulled out a compact pair of binocs. We were using them sparingly, since holding something up to your face while you carefully stare at something was about as obvious as you could get. I looked around carefully before pulling the binocs to my face. Sure enough, the flash of color was Ahsoka making her way to the abandoned warehouse. Tatnia and Julius were right behind her, both of them keeping a close eye open.

"Looks like something set Ahsoka off," I said, handing the binocs back to Nal. "Can you see the agent yet?"

He accepted the binocs back, wiped his face of the rain, and lifted them up to his face, quickly looking through the surveillance device. He shook his head before tucking his goggles away in his jacket.

"I cannot," He responded. "What set her off?"

"Probably an intuition from the force," I explained. "Just hope she didn't pull on it enough to alert the Inquisitors."

We watched Ahsoka approach with our naked eyes, tracking her movements easily once she stepped across a street and better into our view. Whether she had spotted something or felt something through the Force, the three of them arrived just as a woman, the very woman we were looking for, stepped out of the darkness around the corner of the warehouse. She headed straight for the nondescript stone we had been watching, her fingers just wrapping around the edges when Ahsoka made contact. The woman whirled around, her hand going to her hip, already stepping back toward the shadowy alley she had come out from.

She had moved pretty fast, belaying some pretty serious reflexes.

Ahsoka held her hands up, showing she was unarmed. The two had a quick conversation, during which the Agent slowly pulled her hand off her weapon. Eventually, she nodded, and Ahsoka held her hand up in the air, holding her thumb up. Knowing we must be watching by this point, but not where from, that was the signal that everything was fine. We probably could have gotten away with a subtle comms click, but this worked just as well. Before we could move, the woman, who now looked a bit confused, nodded uncertainly before gesturing to the darkness she had stepped out from. Quickly, she led half of our team away, leaving us to follow behind.

"That's our cue, guys," I said, Vaz and Nal already preparing to leave. "Follow me."

I cast Clairvoyance, focusing the spell on Ashoka. I smirked as the spell gave us a clear connection, immediately moving to follow it. Now that the woman knew we were here and Ahoksa, Tatnia, and Julius were with them, they could properly prepare the agent and the kids for us to show up unannounced. We could track them at our leisure, rather than all six of us making our way there all at once, pouring into a spot that had kept them hidden from the empire for nearly a week now.

The spell led us down, and out of the building we had been watching from, through the back alley and trash-laden streets. Twice, we crossed a more populated road, each time waiting for traffic to slow before quickly crossing. I purposely ignored the trail for a few alleys, pulling the directions away from the original dark alley that they had left from, so our route would be different.

Eventually, my spell led us past several abandoned buildings to one that was actually still being used. It was an apartment complex of dubious quality and obvious age, with people coming and going even at this late hour. The nebulous trail of energy led us to the back, where several rusted-out and broken-down speeders lay in shambles. For a moment, I frowned, wondering where the heck the trail of magic was leading us, when one of the speeder doors opened up, revealing a broken down and corroded interior. There was Tatnia, standing mostly inside some sort of manhole tunnel. It seemed that the vehicle had been parked over the entrance to the tunnel, and someone had made a hole through the falling-apart speeder floor so they could access it.

"C'mon, before someone sees us," She said, quickly descending down the hole again.

I could hear the rungs of a metal ladder making soft ringing sounds as she vanished downward. Quickly, I nodded for Nal and Vaz to climb in while I kept a lookout. Once they were gone, I took one more look around before climbing into the speeder, pulling the door closed behind me, followed by the hatch of the tunnel. As I did, what little light was reaching down into the tunnel disappeared, and for a moment, it was nearly pitch black. Thankfully, I had a pretty easy solution for that, and with a flick, I cast Magelight on myself, the floating ball of light following me as I descended.

When I finally reached the bottom, it was in a relatively dry tunnel, about five feet tall, with a smooth floor. In one direction was a rather worrying cave-in. The tunnel collapsed completely, chunks of duracrete and rebar blocking the path completely. In the other direction, I could see Tatnia waving us closer.

This time, I took the lead, following Tatnia for a dozen meters or so before stepping into a massive open space. It must have been some sort of cistern or maybe a water run-off vessel, though it was clearly long since abandoned. Instead, someone had turned it into a rather cozy secret safe house. Two beds, some lights, boxes of supplies, and even some sort of computer, though it was very clearly unplugged and off. It even had a blessedly large, and currently on heater, which making the room nice and toasty. I had to resist the urge to start oulling wet clothes off to warm up beside it.

The space had everything one could need while hiding from the tyrannical law. It was also a bit on the cramped side, now that there were nine of us in it.

The woman, the Rebel agent, turned to us, her hand resting on her weapon, her cloak now hanging on the wall. She was also very deliberately standing in front of a pair of kids, both of whom looked nervous but were clearly taking comfort in their protector.

"This the rest of your team?" She asked, looking at Ahsoka.

"This is Deacon. He is the leader of the Skyforged Vanguard, the team who volunteered to come," Ahsoka explained, though I could hear in her voice that she was repeating herself, perhaps multiple times by now.

"Right. Well, I suppose I'll take all the help we can get," She said with a nod. "Mind telling me what the hell that light is?"

"Just a bit of my own special power," I explained, dropping the light spell, which sparkled and faded away.

Both of the kids were looking around their guardian, eyes wide as they watched my magic fade. I considered doing a little something to show off, but considering the Rebel agent

was still watching me, as if I might lung forward at any moment, I figured making any sudden moves was a bad idea.

"Deacon is in command of this mission," Ahsoka explained, pointedly not looking back at me as I gave her a look. So far, we had been sharing that burden and hadn't really discussed who was really in command. "He and his team are some of the best commandos the Rebellion has access to."

I saw Julius stand a little straighter at that compliment, and Vaz simply nodded as if agreeing with a casual statement. I managed to keep my cool, taking a slow and deliberate step forward, holding my hand out to her. For a long moment, I was worried she would simply ignore my hand, but eventually, she reached forward and took it, giving me one stiff shake.

"Sheora," She said. "Sounds like I should be happy they sent you."

"It's good to meet you, Sheora," I said with what I hoped was a confident smile. "We are gonna get you guys out of here."

My words seemed to finally get through to her, as when she pulled her hand away, she nodded before slowly sitting back on the bed where Claron and Felia were sitting. Claron moved to hug her, while the older just slid closer. As Sheora finally seemed to realize she had some real support in her corner, her iron grip on herself slipped slightly. She sagged a bit, letting out a long, deep breath. She looked rough, but there was else, something new behind her tired eyes.

It was hope.

I cast a glance at both of the kids, and spotted that Claron's arm was bandaged. The bandage disappeared up and under his long sleeve, with just a bit of dried blood visible at the edge. I slowly stepped forward and kneeled in front of him.

"Hey, Kiddo, mind if I take a look at that?" I asked gently.

He looked at me nervously before looking over at his older sister. It was a testament to their life on the streets that he looked to her for permission like he would a parent. Felia frowned and gave me a hard look before eventually nodding, at which point I gently rolled up the sleeve.

"You get this from the accident?" I asked gently, making sure not to touch the actual wound. A nudge at my shoulder prompted me to look over to see Ahsoka holding out a pair of scissors from her belt.

"Yeah... but sis saved me," He said, his voice filled with awe at what she had done. "She's going to be a Jedi."

"She could be," I agreed, lowly cutting up along the bandages, careful not to nick him as I did. "That would be up to her, though. The Jedi were a group, one of many that had a connection to the Force. While many of them don't exist anymore, she could adopt any number of their ideas. Or she could forge her own path."

As I talked, I gently pulled away the bandages, revealing a deep burn that looked relatively well-treated. There was some sort of cream on it, and the area around the burn looked clean, while the burn itself looked just about as good as it could.

"There's going to be some fancy lights," I warned, looking at Claron first and then Felia. "Then it might feel a bit weird. But I promise you're going to be fine, okay?"

I waited for them both to nod in understanding before carefully putting my hand down over the wound, the young boy wincing at the contact. Then I cast Heal Middling Trauma, my hand glowing with Restoration magic, all of it sinking into the wound. Claron gasped, and Felia flinched despite my warning, but they both managed to control themselves. I cast it a second time, just to make sure, before following it up with a couple of casts of Heal Other, taking care of any lingering injuries.

When I pulled away, it revealed that the burn was gone. Looking up at Claron revealed a face of utter wonder and amazement, color returning to his face as I healed him fully. I considered casting Respite on him as well, but I figured normal sleep would be better for him.

"That is amazing!" Claron said, eyes wide. "How did you do that? Was it the Force? Will Felia be able to do that?"

"That was magic," I explained with a smile. "Felia will be able to do other kinds of healing if she works hard and puts her mind to it, but this particular kind isn't something she would be able to replicate. Speaking of your sister, though, why don't we make sure she is all healed as well."

I reached out to her, but she only shook her head, clearly trying to act tough for her younger sibling.

"I'm fine," She insisted. "Thank you for healing Claron, but I'm fine."

"Alright, but I'm sure knowing you were in perfect health would be the weight of your little brother's shoulders," I pointed out, nodding to her younger sibling.

The young boy was either a natural or knew exactly what I was doing because he immediately shifted to a puppy-eyed look, beseeching his sister to let me do my work without even speaking up. Felia gave me a hard look, clearly understanding my ploy, but nonetheless held out her hand, letting me heal her up. She gained a bit more color in her cheeks when I was done, as well. I spent a good chunk of mana making sure Sheora was healthy as well, giving

her an extra Respite to perk her up as well. She looked more grateful for that than any amount of healing I did for her.

"Alright, well, now that we've all settled down a bit," I said, getting a much less aggressive, much calmer look from Sheora than I did when I first arrived. "We can start to talk about our exfiltration options."

"You have more than one?" Sheora asked, sounding surprised. "I couldn't come up with anything viable, not while keeping the little ones safe."

"We've got as many as we can come up with," I responded with a shrug.

"You came here... without a way off the planet?" She asked, looking from me and then over to Ahsoka. "I don't know if I should be impressed, devastated, or angry."

"Let's settle on hopeful for now," I said, pulling out a nearby supply crate and sitting down with a nod. "We've got plenty of ways of getting us out of here. We just need to figure them out."