

As I returned to the *Talos Chariot*, I spotted Miru, Pola, and Luke working on something in Miru's workspace. The younger Twi'lek waved to me as I walked past, and I waved back as I made my way through. I saw Luke debating whether to follow me before Miru got his attention again. I couldn't help but smile, knowing that my crew was a bit blasé about people with strange abilities. With no connection to the Rebellion, they could see him as just another person, something Luke desperately needed.

I climbed up to the second deck and had a quick conversation with Calima, making sure she was okay sticking around the ships while most of the crew went off on our mission to this CIS base. She was a little nervous to be stuck here without the usual insurance we brought, but she was confident she could handle it and that the Rebels wouldn't do anything stupid.

Before long, the crew was getting ready, strapping on weapons and double-checking that everyone had the proper equipment. I spotted that Luke was just standing there, waiting, and shook my head.

"Luke, someday you are going to be able to block blaster bolts as easily as you breathe," I said as reassuringly as possible. "Unfortunately, that day isn't today. Put on some armor and strap a pistol to your hip."

Reluctantly, he eventually agreed, letting Nal find some light but sturdy armor, something that would protect his vitals but let him move freely. He was even more reluctant to carry a backup pistol."

"I'm a Jedi. I don't need a blaster," He stated emphatically. "Obi-wan said that-"

"Obi-wan was a fantastic man, an inspiration, and a powerful Jedi. He was also a fully trained Jedi," I added with a wince. "There weren't many problems he couldn't solve with the Force and a lightsaber."

"But I'm not there yet," Luke admitted in defeat, shaking his head.

"True, but I also think the fact that the Jedi didn't carry backup pistols is ridiculous," I added. "The lightsaber is a weapon and a tool. So is a blaster. Just because you can solve most problems with a multitool doesn't mean you shouldn't also carry a [hydrospanner](#)."

As Luke looked over our blasters, I sent Julius out to talk to whoever he could find. Eventually, he managed to get directed to where Lieutenant Soran was. With a bit of cajoling, Julius managed to convince him that sharing some resources was a good idea since we would be working together. We still paid for them, but two thousand credits for ten basic grenades was chump change. Well, they were basic for Star Wars, at least. They were adjustable, meaning they could shift from a normal explosive to a shaped charge, set to stick to metal surfaces, or even made into a tripwire.

Nal assured me that they were definitely not thermal detonators, which were considerably more dangerous, less reliable, and more expensive.

When everyone was finally ready, and everyone did a triple check of their gear on Vaz's insistence, we made our way up to the hangar bay, arriving just before the time General Syndulla insisted on. Ahsoka was already there, as were Lieutenant Soran, his troops, Nevue, and his team. We spent about twenty minutes shaking hands and making introductions before settling in to wait with Nevue and his team. He had Lario and Ayme with him, as well as three other rebel soldiers we hadn't met. A Twi'lek male, a [Mon Calamari](#) female, and a human woman.

"This is Foster, Uknia and Teril. Teril is our infiltration specialist, Foster is our slicer, and Uknia is our explosive expert," He said, gesturing to the Twi'lek, Mon Cal, and Human, respectively.

"It's nice to meet you all. I look forward to working with you," I said with a nod. "This is Tatnia, Nal, Julius and Vaz. Oh, and I'm Deacon. Tatnia, Nal, and Julius are general combat experts, Vaz leans towards heavy weapons, and I do spooky shit with my mind. Oh, and this is Luke. He does a different type of spooky shit, but his is invisible."

My description of one of the most famous members of the Rebellion and his Force abilities got a chuckle out of a few people, cutting some of the building tension.

We spent a while longer talking about what I could do, what type of roles we would be sharing, and what our general strategy would be before eventually stalling out, picking some space on the hangar floor, and settling in to wait. Eventually, our rides arrived and landed in the hangar bays. Before we climbed in, General Syndulla entered the hangar, giving a short speech before waving us through. We climbed aboard the shuttles and took off a few minutes later, up and out of the atmosphere.

The interior of the Aegis-class shuttle was mostly open, with seats along the aft and port walls. The troops brought on a few crates of stuff, but beyond that, it was just my team, Nevue's team, and twenty or so rebel soldiers. Despite there being plenty of room and having grabbed a seat along the aft, I still felt anxious and uncomfortable, tapping my foot against the deck as it shook slightly, pushing through Thila's atmosphere. Tatnia noticed and perfectly explained the problem despite the fact that I didn't even realize it yet.

"It's the first time he's flown on a ship he doesn't control or at least knows the pilot," She explained, Nal and Vaz nodding in understanding. "You get used to it, Boss."

"Not sure I want to," I said, shaking my head. "That would mean doing this multiple times to build a resistance."

We landed inside our final transport hangar bay with a clunk that resonated through the shuttle. The shuttle bay doors opened, and we walked out into a decent-sized hangar bay. You could see out into space from the bay doors, which were sealed by a blue glowing magnetic shielding.

From the hangar bay, we were guided to several large ready rooms, with space to wait through the nearly two-day hyperspace trip in relative comfort. Which meant food, some places to sleep, and enough places to walk around that we didn't feel too cramped.

With so much extra time on my hands, where we were basically locked into a few different places, I almost immediately pulled out my grimoire. Before claiming a corner of space and starting the spell-learning process, I asked the crew to run interference for me so that nobody would distract me too much

With the two-day journey, which took us right to the edge of known space, along the edge of the unknown region, I learned two spells. The first was Chain Lighting, a powerful offensive option that would hopefully make quick work of the droves of B1's we would probably face, as well as Conjurer Archer Construct, which would act as a powerful addition to the team's firepower, as well as function as a disposable asset.

I'm sure I got plenty of strange looks, hunched over a book, my hand occasionally glowing as I pushed magic through the three matrices, testing and tuning them until I finally completed both spells for the first time. Luckily, any doubt that I was capable of doing *something* was well and truly squashed when, at the end of the first day, I summoned an archer construct out of nowhere.

The [archer construct](#) was much less heavily armored than the fire atronach I summoned with my Conjure Flame Atronach spell. Despite that, the spell's description said nothing about it being less resilient to damage. Still, I made a note to eventually experiment with it to see if it was less armored or just an aesthetic. As I was checking out the archer's look, I discovered that if you managed to peer "under" the translucent hood that covered the archer's head, you could see it had a smooth, featureless face that all but punched the uncanny valley button in my brain.

With almost all of my time spent learning new magic, the journey passed quickly, and I was raring to go. I had spent nearly two days straight doing nothing but sitting and adjusting spell matrices, so I was bored, antsy, and ready for action. Luckily, I didn't have to wait long, as I was woken up early the morning after learning Chain Lightning by Tatnia nudging my shoulder.

"It's time, Boss. They want us on the shuttles again," She explained, and I quickly got ready, packing my stuff and checking my gear.

Everyone piled back onto the shuttles, half the troopers in each shuttle. Nevue and his team and Ahsoka stuck with one half in one shuttle, while my team and Luke claimed the other. As we settled in, mainly behind the temporary cover the troopers would be moving into the

hangar once it was clear, the pilots announced that *Glory* had just dropped out of hyperspace with no interference. A few minutes later, they announced that Green Squadron and the *Verdant Dream* were beginning stage one.

We sat, leaned, and kneeled with bated breath, wondering how the assault was going. Thankfully, we didn't have to wait for long. After about fifteen minutes, the shuttle began to hum as its engines kicked up, and the pilot came on again.

"We just got final confirmation, scans came back clean, threats eliminated, engaging stage two," The gravelly voice, definitely not human, said through the intercom.

We could feel the ship lifting off and leaving the protection of the hangar, the shuttle making a beeline for our target. Unfortunately, we were completely blind in the lower part of the ship. If I thought leaving Thila was nerve-wracking, this was horrendous. I clenched and gripped the armrest beside me, desperately trying not to imagine a lone missed turret spotting our shuttle and annihilating it entirely out of our control. I leaned in closer to Tatnia.

"We are putting a significant portion of the money we make here into upgrading the *Brick*," I said, gritting my teeth. "I want our shuttle to be built to take on a Star Destroyer."

Tatnia chuckled and nodded, but I could tell she was nervous, too.

Once we entered the atmosphere, the ship slowed down significantly, angling hard enough that we could feel it slightly despite the ship's artificial gravity and inertial compensators.

"Coming in on final approach, prepare to disembark!" The same gravelly voice announced, and I quickly stood up from my spot behind cover.

With a nod, Vaz and I made our way to the portable cover barrier closest to the front of the ship. I quickly summoned my armor, feeling the familiar protective energy encapsulate me. Vaz took up position behind me, using me as cover as I stood ready, Greater Ward charged and ready.

"Landing! Opening bay doors!"

Another clunk reverberated through the ship, and the large forward bay door began to descend, red blaster bolts already lighting up the interior of the shuttle. I could feel the shuttle opening up with its weapons, covering us as the bay door lowered to reveal a hangar bay with a sizable amount of droids, both B1's and B2's, all of them focused on us.

I finally released the Greater Ward, the shimmering protective barrier appearing, covering most of myself and what little of Vaz was exposed. Together, we led the disembarkment, her Z-6 rotary cannon unloading, taking down a handful of droids in her first sweep alone. Soon, the rest of the troops engaged as well, and the droids began to fall like

dominoes, with the laser cannons mounted on the ship easily taking down the heavier armored B2's.

Vaz and I pushed further into the hangar, blaster bolts ricocheting off my Ward and some managing to catch my conjured armor. Across the hangar, Ahsoka was leading the charge on her side, deflecting blaster bolts and sending them back to the droids that shot them.

Unfortunately, for every droid we destroyed, another two more entered from the entrance into the hangar bay. We took our first few losses as Vaz and I pushed the final distance to the large door, taking cover on one side. Luckily, the pilots of the *Mover* and *Shaker* spotted the problem just a moment after we did and began focusing their fire on and into the doorway, absolutely wrecking any incoming droid reinforcements. Three minutes after the shuttle bay doors opened, the droids pulled back, ceding the hangar to us.

Once the pilots noticed there were no more incoming droids, they stopped pummeling the hallway, and the hangar bay went silent for ten seconds, which was when Lieutenant Soran started shouting orders to set up Hangar Base. I nodded back toward the group, and Vaz nodded, heading to join the rest of the crew, her rotary canon still smoking slightly. I could see Ahsoka keeping an eye on the door, Luke standing beside her, looking a bit lost, while I made a beeline to where they had dragged the injured troopers.

Out of twenty-five soldiers, six had been hit during the landing. One of them took a B2 barrage to the chest and was dead before they hit the ground. The other five were still hanging on, though, which meant I could fix them. I completely healed them over the next five minutes, bringing four up to fighting fit. The fifth had been hit in the hand, blasting off a few fingers, which meant all I could do was stop the bleeding.

By the time I stepped away from the injured troopers, I was getting a lot more looks, a few of them respectful, most of them wide-eyed.

After a quick look around, I spotted the go team, most of the strike team having gathered by the far hangar wall. Luke waved me over as I spotted them, but the young Jedi hopeful continued looking around after I joined them.

"What's wrong?" I asked, catching his slightly confused expression.

"I don't know. Something feels off," He said, looking around some more. "I can't put my finger on it though."

I looked to Ahsoka, who nodded in agreement.

"I feel it as well. It's not oppressive, but something is not how it seems," She explained. "I was going to mention it when you joined us."

I frowned, looking around as Luke was. The hangar bay was a wash of activity, troopers setting up heavy laser cannons and temporary barriers, pushing droid parts out of their way. I spotted a few troopers trying to push a vulture starfighter to the side before looking up to see more starfighters still latched into their quick-deploy storage racks.

“Why didn’t those starfighters deploy?” I asked. “There are a lot here... and there are three other hangars. That’s a lot of ships for one squadron to take on.”

Ahsoka frowned and pulled out a comm unit.

“Captain Yernit, come in, Captain Yernit. This is Commander Ahsoka Tano from the ground team,” She said, still looking puzzled. “How many starfighters did you and Green Squadron face?”

“...Commander Tano, this is Captain Yernit. We faced no more than thirty, no less than twenty, all of them the Vulture droids you described.”

“What? There’s that many in this hangar alone,” Luke said, looking up at the ceiling. “Why-”

Before he could finish, a metal blast door, just under two feet thick, engaged along the hangar bay opening, sliding across from left to right. It slammed shut with a responding thud that shook the floor beneath us. We were silent for a long moment, all of us staring at what was once our way out should anything go wrong.

“*That*, my friends... is what we like to call a bad sign,” I said, Tatnia slapping the back of my head.

“*Perhaps, but it doesn't have to be,*” A robotic voice said, coming from the hangar bay's intercom. “*That is all up to your comrades in the sky.*”