

We ended up staying on Nirn long enough to watch 4th Group leave for their mission with the Rebels, though not through any sort of plan or choice. Ahsoka and I personally saw our friends off, before heading back home to enjoy some downtime before starting to look for our next mission. 4th group would be gone for a full two weeks, as that was how long before their window into the raid opened.

They would likely spend that time planning and infiltrating the planet, preparing for their large-scale heist. Judging by how confident Ezra and Sabine were when they left, I was willing to bet that there was a good chance they would be coming back with a sizable paycheck. I wished them good luck as they left, warning them to be careful and not get overconfident.

Unfortunately, 1st Group did not get to enjoy the rest of their leave as I wanted. Like clockwork, almost an hour after 4th Group left, I received an urgent message from Clan Galti, and I rushed to Fury to receive the communication. As the holoprojector blinked on, it was not Vi, like I expected, but rather one of her lieutenants.

"Admiral Deacon, thank you for responding so quickly," They said. "I apologize for contacting you with such an urgent request, but... we need your help. I ask if the Skyforged Vanguard might once again save Clan Galti from disaster."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Vi Galti has been captured, along with half of our warriors," He explained. "We were pursuing our target of vengeance, Moff Gideon, the man in charge of the dark trooper project. We recently learned that not only was he responsible for targeting our covert as practice for his dark troopers, but he was also a prime orchestrator of the night of a thousand tears."

"And let me guess, in your anger, you rushed in and got overwhelmed?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

The Mandalorian's face hardened, his fists clenched. I could tell he was fighting back his frustration, wanting to respond harshly but holding back since I was likely his best bet of getting his people back alive. Unfortunately, I realized belatedly that, while my point was likely valid, it was a bit cruel to throw that in his face while his people were at the mercy of the Empire.

"I apologize," I said, bowing my head slightly. "That was uncalled for. I can't say I would react better in a similar circumstance."

He took a second to recover, and rather than respond, he simply nodded, pausing for a long moment to calm down before continuing.

"I will admit, our mission was... fueled greatly by our anger," he eventually responded. "The mission spiraled almost immediately, and we were forced to retreat. Before we could escape, Vi and her team were captured."

"How long ago was this?"

"We received word only two hours ago," he responded, wincing slightly. "There was a debate on whether we should contact you."

"Let's hope whoever slowed you down can live knowing they delayed their people's rescue," I said with a frown. "I need every bit of information you have on the target. We will gather our forces, but I cannot assure you we will take this mission. If it is too dangerous..."

"I... I understand," the lieutenant said with a nod. "Please know that you are our greatest hope. We have no other allies who would even stand a chance. We are sending you our data, but please, hurry."

I looked towards our comms droid, which silently confirmed we were receiving a data package. Once the droid nodded, I looked back at the Mandalorian warrior.

"I will have an answer for you within an hour," I assured him. "Until then... have you considered your location may no longer be safe?"

"It pains me to think my friends might be subject to such torture... but we have considered it," He admitted. "We are packing up as we speak."

"Good, find someplace to lie low," I responded. "We will consider this rescue mission."

"Thank you," He said with a bow. "We will await your word."

The message cut out, and I looked at the super tactical droid, the one who had come with the Lucerhulk. He stood at attention and waited for my orders. I took a deep breath as I gathered my thoughts, before calling out my orders.

"Contact Sheora, Tatnia, Ahsoka, as well as the captains and leaders of 1st and 2nd group here now. Tell them that it is beyond urgent," I ordered clearly. "Put the groups on prep, get everyone ready. Where is 3rd Group?"

"3rd Group is currently still split up, escorting the Salvage Fleet as they disassemble the fuel production plant," the droid responded cleanly. "The *Hope* and *Wonder* are here for resupply and rest."

"Make sure they don't leave, get their captains here as well, and Commander Frost," I responded. "Slow down the salvage process if you have to."

"Yes, Admiral Deacon," the droid responded, before tilting its head slightly. "Sheora is already on her way to the primary meeting room. Should I send the data to her?"

"Yes, and to everyone else I just listed, so they can peruse as they travel."

The droid nodded and set to work, while I pulled out my data pad and left the bridge, heading for the usual meeting room. By the time I arrived, Sheora was already sitting in her usual corner, scrolling through the information.

"They really fucked up on this one," she said, shaking her head as she scrolled through it. "Not entirely their fault, from what they knew, the opportunity looked valid, but..."

Apparently, Moff Gideon was new to his position, his rising influence coming with his successful pacification of Mandalore and the creation of the dark trooper program. He was holed up on a planet not far from Mandalore, which was actually only a day and a half from Nirn. The planet was considered barely livable, with just enough of a clean atmosphere for their people not to suffocate. There, the Moff was in control of a large military base, where stormtroopers were converted into dark troopers, a long process that included training, more severe brainwashing, and cybernetic surgeries.

The kind of nightmare stuff that made me feel bad for Stormtroopers.

Luckily for us, he lacked a large-scale influence on the region, since he was still so new to his position. This limited his options, but not so much that he was anything near defenseless. He had a single modern [Arquitens](#), a [Gladiator-class Star Destroyer](#), and a trio of [IPV-1 System Patrol Craft](#) defending his base. They were supported by two full wings of TIE fighters based on the ground, as well as a full installation of ground assets. Just about the only saving grace was that he didn't have any planetary shielding in place.

Clan Galti had done their research and found that the Gladiator and two of the IPVs regularly left the planet, following what seemed to be a scheduled patrol. Unfortunately, Clan Galti had already shown their hand. They had spent the last month hunting various Imperial assets concerning the dark trooper program, and even longer hunting down the person who sold them out in the first place.

Unfortunately, the regularly scheduled patrols were a trap.

Gideon *knew* that Clan Galti was hunting for him and anything to do with the dark trooper program. He knew he needed to prepare. How he did it, Vi's lieutenant wasn't sure, all he knew was that within a minute of them dipping out of hyperspace, the Gladiator and its escorts returned, dropping on them just as they entered the atmosphere. I could see it pretty clearly, the "patrol" jumping out just far enough to disappear. They would only be a single microjump away from ambushing whoever stopped by.

Vi attempted to use the base itself as a shield, staying above it so the Imperials couldn't fire down on them, but with two wings of TIE fighters and various variants, they were easily corralled and snagged by tractor beams.

It was not a pretty picture, with the Moff having enough forces to make us pause and consider our options clearly.

By far, the most significant threat was the Gladiator, which was, overall, a close match to the *Hope*. Thankfully, though, that did not include the *Hope* and its fighter complement. The Arquiten was a close second, as it out-weighted any other single ship in both the 1st and 2nd Groups. If we wanted to take it down, along with the three IPV's, we would need to overwhelm them with starfighters. Unless, of course, someone came up with something smart.

Within fifteen minutes, the meeting assembled, and we began discussing our options. Unsurprisingly, Corvak wanted to assist, and Tatnia, always one to put our safety first, said it was too risky. Perhaps the biggest point of contention was that while the information was solid, it was also old, from before they had successfully captured half of Clan Galti's fighting force. We had no idea whether or not more ships would be there when we arrived.

"Look, it's not worth the risk," Tatnia said. "Send some aid to those who escaped, offer them a place to live, but we can't risk our people. We already saved them once, we can't be expected to pull their asses out of the fire every time they mess up. "

"I don't refute that," Corvak said, with a tone that said he clearly did. "But they have been running successful missions against the Empire for months. They are allies and enemies of our enemy. Not saving a resource like that would be silly, even if they weren't connected to us."

"Connected to you," Tatnia pointed out. "While you and your people are an important part of the Skyforged, you're also a small part. I'm not belittling you, but we can't throw away large resources just because-"

"Tatnia, that was too much," I commented, stopping her in her tracks. "You make a valid point, but the truth is that, whether we like it or not, we have connected ourselves to the Mandalorians. Our home is named in their language, and I made an open offer to all of them that if they meet us halfway, we could be their home. Calling that nothing is wrong."

Tatnia chewed on her lip for a moment, before eventually nodding in reluctant agreement.

"That said, we cannot just jump into this, the match-up is way too close," I said, leaning back in my chair. "Even if we stack the extra squadrons into the *Hope*, we can't underestimate the combined forces of the ground-stationed TIE wings and their fleet."

"We could do the same thing as when we first rescued them," the captain of the *Fury* suggested. "We have one more kamikaze station."

"It's a possibility, but these are the people who we hit with that," I pointed out. "The second we show up, they will be on the lookout for that. And a Gladiator is more maneuverable than a Star Destroyer."

"Then let's bring the *Fury*," Tatnia said. "If this is something you feel we have to do, and you are looking for assurances, the *Fury* would assure we have the greatest chance of coming out clean."

I let out a long breath and eventually nodded. Bringing the *Boxi's Fury* with us would go a long way in making our victory more likely. It had enough firepower to take down the Gladiator by itself, and with several squadrons on board, it could hold off the other ships. With the support of the *Hope* and *Wonder*, as well as 1st and 2nd Groups...

"Okay, we will bring the *Fury*. We are going to need to send out a warning..."

With the decision to bring the *Fury*, we seemed to have cemented our participation. While the captain of the *Fury* left to monitor the preparations, we continued to work on our plan, coming up with several ideas and locking in plan A, as well as coming up with our backup plans, just in case the situation spiraled away from us.

It became pretty clear that the only way we would be able to rescue Vi and her people was if we, at a minimum, pacified the Imperial fleet. Once we controlled the skies, we could move on to locating our targets on the ground and extracting them.

When we pulled out, we would likely pause to flatten the base as well, to hopefully put an end to the production of dark troopers. They were the greatest threat to my people the Empire had at the moment, which meant they needed to be burned.

In all honesty, that was just as big a reason to take this mission as rescuing Clan Galti.

When the meeting ended, we all split up to our various tasks, quickly preparing for our new mission. The *Fury* was alive with activity as some people were evacuated, while others hunkered down in their rooms. Ships were being transferred back and forth, with freighters leaving early for hauling missions to keep from being inactive for too long. My team, along with the rest of 1st Group, was already on board the *Fury*, which we would be hitching a ride on to our first stop, which was just a short jump from our target planet. There we would deploy and spread out, including our starfighters.

Speaking of the starfighter squadrons, we were shipping out with a ridiculous amount. The *Fury* had three squadrons of MA-wings and two Heavy Arcs. When we were done shuffling people around, the *Hope* would match that, while the *Whale Shark* had one less of each. We were on track to *match and outnumber* the two wings of TIE fighters from the Imperial base, which drastically increased our chances of overwhelming them with as few casualties as possible.

Certainly made me feel a lot more comfortable about the mission.

While everyone was preparing, I reached out to Clan Galti, explaining that we had agreed to take the mission and that we would arrive at the target planet in just over a day and a half. They asked to participate, as more than half of their fighters were ready, but time was of the essence, and we couldn't afford to waste time picking them up. Vi's lieutenant was frustrated by the truth, but ultimately understood. We were racing against the clock, as we had no idea what Moff Gideon would be doing to their prisoners.

We were ready to move out within three hours of making our final decision. Our fleet of ships, consisting of the full 1st and 2nd groups, *Boxi's Fury*, *Wonder*, and *Hope*, all pulled into a loose formation. This was only the second time that the *Fury* was being deployed for combat, and as I stood on the bridge, watching our fleet jump to lightspeed before we finally did as well, I could feel the tension running through the few living crewmembers.

