

Once we dropped back out of hyperspace, now in deep space and completely hidden from the Empire, it was time to start reviewing the damage. Luckily for us, the Imperials only managed to break through the shields of two of our ships, the *Liberty Rush* and the *Erso's Call*. That said, they were not the only ships with damage, they just had the worst of it.

The *Liberty's* hull had been breached in two places, but the damage was minimal, and the only casualties were some damaged droids, some minor frostbite, and a concussion. On top of that, their long-distance sensor array was slagged completely, evidence of a very close call that could have resulted in a much less clean victory. The blast of plasma that had done that would have done considerable damage to the ship if it had struck the hull cleanly.

The *Erso's Call*, on the other hand, was unable to get their shields going again, as the energy that finally dispersed them fed back into the systems and fried several important parts. They also had one of their larger turrets destroyed, as well as some damage to one of their thrusters. The latter was technically functional, but they had shut it down to prevent further damage.

It would likely take two or three hundred thousand credits to get everything working again, not to mention a few weeks. The most difficult challenge would be finding replacement parts for the high-grade weapons, so much so that the *Erso's Call* would likely spend some time down a few weapons before we could find them. Thankfully, we now had the proper facilities to make the process considerably easier when we finally got the parts.

Beyond those two ships, the only damage we sustained was burnt-out shield capacitors, which was a common enough issue when shields were sufficiently tested. It was such a common repair issue that the parts, even for our larger ships, were fairly common. Hell, according to the engineer I talked to, some considered changing out shield capacitors to be a standard part of maintenance, though he assured me it wasn't actually necessary.

As we were going over the damage, visually inspecting our ships and discussing the jump home, the smaller ships of our fleet, as well as 4th fleet, arrived, pulling into formation as we split from the Rebellion. They had been waiting for us to call for aid, but thankfully, that hadn't been necessary.

About twenty minutes after arriving at our deep-space stopping point, Admiral Ackbar called through the comms, a small projection of him appearing from a projector at the front of the bridge.

"Admiral Ackbar, congratulations on a successful mission," I said with a smile. "I can't imagine that going much better than it did."

"I am certainly glad with the results," he confirmed with a heavy nod. "The *Herald*, the dreadnought that was part of your first group, was the most seriously damaged ship among us, with only a few close calls coming close. What of your ships?"

"Our Pelta took some damage to its hull and sensors, and the *Erso's Call* lost a few weapons, but by and large we came out well," I responded with a smile.

"Seems like your luck covered both of us, then," He joked, his barbels twitching. "Your assistance in this battle was a large reason we came out so unscathed. We likely would have taken significantly more damage if we didn't have so many ships to rotate."

"Perhaps, but the fleet movement you provided was nothing short of brilliant," I said, dipping my head in acknowledgment. "Without such precise guides and planning, we would have likely not been able to keep that dance up for long. I hope you don't mind if we utilize it on a smaller scale?"

"You are more than welcome to, though be wary of overusing it," he warned seriously. "The Imperial Navy is nothing if not efficient. They will plan a counter soon enough."

"Fair," I responded with a nod. "Well, Admiral, it has been an experience. I look forward to working with you in the future. We will keep you updated on what missions we run in the area, since we will likely both be active here. May the Force be with you."

"And you as well."

A moment later, the projector cleared, and I turned back to the rest of the bridge, making my way across the centerline. Within another ten minutes, we had a course calculated, and after pulling the combined 1st and 4th fleets further away, and sending a final farewell to the Rebel fleet, we made the jump to light speed.

Immediately after jumping, I sent a comms message back home, warning them that we had some lightly damaged ships, as well as letting them know what we would need to fix them, so our merchant teams could get started on finding the more difficult to source parts. I also sent a message to Sheora so that she could start researching the section of space that we had been working in. Assuming that the Rebel intelligence was correct, we had just dealt a significant blow to the Empire's ability to patrol the area around the fuel depot, and I wanted to take full advantage of that.

The more missions that Sheora could pull around that area, before the Empire came up with a solution to the problem, the better.

Technically, Ackbar had been under the impression it would likely take a long time for the Empire to replace the fuel station, and while that was likely true, that didn't mean they wouldn't be able to come up with alternative solutions. I wouldn't be surprised that, in a month's time, the large patrol fleets in the area simply started traveling with massive fuel ships. That, of course, posed its own logistical issues, as well as opportunities for us, but suffice to say, I was not as confident as the Rebels of their half-year estimation.

After our trip home, as well as our brief stop at the security checkpoint, we finally arrived back at Nirn. I quickly finished my usual trip around the city and beyond, checking on our projects and confirming that everything was running smoothly.

After that, I settled down for a few days of break and relative relaxation. Between heading out to deliver Rogue Squadron to Alpha Base and then traveling with the Rebel fleet for the joint mission, it had been well over a week of constant traveling. I didn't mind being on starships like some people, as the wonder at being in space was likely to never wear out. Still, I did find myself thinking of home.

By the end, I was seriously missing the fresh air and wildlife of Nirn.

Which of course meant that the day that I got home, I once again locked myself away into seclusion to learn another spell. I learned the permanent Conjure Mage Construct previously, though I was still working on keeping it around full-time and not banishing it instinctively whenever I was done with it. I also learned the Mass Invisibility spell, which would no doubt come in handy the second I went boots on the ground for a mission. That meant my list of must-have spells was down to three, and when I learned them, I could shift to learning them at a slower pace.

For one, I eventually needed to learn a Master level combat spell. The highest level of Destruction spells were too powerful for me to not have at least one in my repertoire, as I was pretty sure they could punch through lightly armored vehicles, maybe even TIE fighters.

I also desperately wanted to learn two Restoration spells, Heal Critical Trauma and Body Repair. The Heal Critical Trauma was an even more directed and potent upscaling of Heal Middling Trauma, and was likely the most powerful healing spell I would get, at least from the grimoire. It could heal massively traumatic damage, including injuries with substantial amounts of missing mass. I knew for a fact it could heal missing fingers, chunks of organs, and more, as that was in the description, but I had a good feeling that with some experimentation, I could get it to do even more.

Body Repair was a specialized Restoration spell designed to return a body to its proper state, rather than just heal. The differences between the two concepts were subtle, but the slight shift in purpose meant a lot for the spell's use. Not only was the amount of mana it cost to cast increased, but its ability to heal was altered. It had a significantly lower effectiveness for healing fresh, active wounds, but it also finally allowed me to repair older, partially healed things like poorly set bones, scar tissue, and, with any luck, missing limbs that have grown over or had been partially fused to cybernetics.

Was I looking forward to the first time I cast a spell on a poorly set bone, hearing it snap into place and heal again? No, I was not. I was also not sure that the combination of Heal Critical Trauma and Body Repair would actually let me heal missing limbs. Despite that, judging by the potency of the spell, I would still find it very useful.

After considering my three options, I finally settled on learning Heal Critical Trauma. Healing magic was always a good call, and it was potent enough to warrant learning first. I would likely focus on a Destruction spell next, before finishing off with Repair Body. When I was done with that, I would likely take a break from learning personal magic for a bit to focus on the process of turning someone else into a mage.

I was honestly tempted to do that now anyway, but I knew several things needed to happen before we were ready for that, so I could prioritize my own advancement for now.

When I was finally done learning the Master level Restoration spell, I had spent twenty-three hours meditating and learning the spell, followed by another full twenty-five hours recovering from it. With judicious use of Respite and healing spells, I came out the other end of a two-day process feeling good, with a new, powerful spell under my belt. I spent a while casting and recasting it, of course, making sure to burn the spell into my memory and then deeper.

When I finally emerged from my seclusion, I was greeted by a few messages from Amescoll. He wanted to meet and discuss my proposal, both for help finding people with little to almost no connection to the Force, and for the Jedi, specifically whatever sort of order comes after the Empire is destroyed, to work together with my mages. I ended up meeting him at the same park Yoda used to frequent, sitting not far from his spot, which had become a sort of quasi memorial.

"Amescoll, it's good to see you," I said, shaking his hand with a smile.

"It's good to see you as well," He said with a nod, gesturing to an empty bench. "Shall we sit?"

I nodded, and after we both got comfortable, we watched some of the younger Jedi as they ran through some lightsaber drills, casually chatting with each other. I recognized some of them as being from the groups we had found, while others had joined through Kestis. We even had two teenagers we discovered among the families who had joined us for work. After a few minutes of us catching up, Amescoll finally brought up why we had met up in the first place.

"As Ahsoka predicted, as we meditated, we found no warnings in the Force, despite a few of us actively looking for it," The older Jedi explained, a light smile on his face. "In fact, many have sensed an interest, maybe even an active curiosity about your ability."

"You know, as much as I enjoy anthropomorphizing the Force, hearing an actual Jedi do it is a lot less funny," I said, rubbing my forehead before gesturing for him to continue. "The implications are... a lot to handle. Does that mean you are willing to help?"

"We are, though we are still debating on how to do so," he admitted. "Our current best idea is to simply mediate in the busiest places in the city, looking for people without a deep connection."

"And then what, pull them aside and offer them magic?" I asked with a frown. "I have an easier way. We work on getting one of the Ysalamiri from the island to a more easily accessible location. Then we host a block party, with everyone who approaches it getting a free meal or something. Most people will feel *something* when they get within its anti-force bubble, but anyone who doesn't we send to you for a final scan."

"That... You have a unique talent for thinking outside the box, Deacon," Amescoll said, shaking his head, chuckling as he did. "Using a method to block the Force as a way to find those who are weak with it."

"If you think that's impressive, then consider the inverse," I pointed out with a smirk.

Amescoll looked at me with a slightly puzzled expression, before his eyes went wide in understanding. His jaw dropped at the implication, and I could help but chuckle.

"If someone with little connection to the Force has no reaction, then someone with a strong connection would certainly be affected," he said, rocking back slightly from the impact of the idea. "Even with no training, they would still certainly notice."

"That's right. It would let you scan hundreds, maybe thousands of people in just a few minutes," I pointed out, nodding in agreement with the conclusion he reached. "No more waiting for strange occurrences or for parents to reach out in concern. Just put on a parade and watch the crowd for people suddenly looking lost, confused, or disoriented."

"We could rebuild in months," he said, looking out into the distance with starry eyes, as if witnessing the return of the order. "We could push past the previous order, easily."

"Whoa, hold your horses," I said, shaking my head. "It sounds like something amazing, but the old order had ten thousand active Jedi. What would an order with fifty thousand or a hundred thousand look like? If there were a Jedi order on every planet with thousands of members, how would they be seen?"

The stars slowly faded from Amescoll's eyes, and he frowned as he considered my question.

"At best, they would be seen as a galactic-level police force," He responded, the excitement draining from his body. "At the worst, we would look like an invading force, an occupying army. Not to mention it would be impossible to keep in order. Each planet's group would be its own evolving entity, able to bolster its forces at will from the planet's population. If they slipped to the dark side..."

"An army of Dark Jedi. Worse, if someone following the path of the Sith found out about the method, they could restart the Sith Empire in relatively short order."

The older Jedi's eyes went even wider, now joined by a quickly paling face. He opened his mouth to comment, but no words came out, his voice stuck on silent.

"It's okay, Amescoll, just keep the idea to yourself," I said, patting his shoulder reassuringly. "We will come up with a way to disguise it when we do it, and it can stay a state secret."

"You... You are a special kind of crazy, my friend," The Jedi said, shaking his head, leaning heavily back in his seat. "To state something so monumental so casually..."

"Sorry, my mouth sometimes moves before I can consider what I'm saying," I admitted with a chuckle. "Perhaps we should switch back to a calmer subject."

Amescoll gave me a look before letting out a long sigh, closing his eyes for a moment before nodding.

"Very well. Let us discuss this potential partnership between Jedi and magic user more," He finally said. "My colleagues were curious..."

We sat on the bench for another hour or so, discussing what exactly the mage and Jedi duo would look like. Eventually, we both had other businesses to attend to, and we parted ways, both of us excited about the future. It would take some time, and we had quite a few hurdles in the way, but what we could create on the other side would be nothing short of incredible, of that I was sure.

We just needed to survive long enough to build it.