

I ended up hanging out with the clones late into the night, listening to their stories and occasionally sharing my own. During that time, I learned a bit about their stationing at the secret storage facility. Nearly everyone on the station had been a clone, and their control chips were almost consistently engaged, turning the whole experience into a multi-year hell of perfectly adhered-to rules and orders. It went a long way to explaining why all of them were so okay with having been kidnapped and medically treated with brain surgery without their consent.

They were just happy to be able to talk to people outside their downtime, which had been inhumanely short. Not to mention the lack of entertainment and resources. The less said about the hellish quality of the food, the better.

When I finally left, I did so after promising to return within a few days with more beer. I also placed an order for sabacc cards, some dice, and a few other items of entertainment for them, before shaking hands and heading out.

Originally, I had intended to ask this group of clones to join me, breaking the huge group we had rescued into chunks for easier processing, but the more time I spent with them, the more I realized that would have been a mistake. Not only was their commander, who hadn't been processed yet, missing, but I could tell the group wouldn't have made a decision without all of their brothers. This was a group of clones that had suffered under an oppressive yoke for an extra twenty years. There was no way they would reach a conclusion without everyone present.

Technically, there were a few dozen clone survivors we managed to pull from the *Deceptor*, but I felt no need to single them out. I was patient, and honestly, the longer I could give my people on the ground to prepare for a sudden influx of people, the better.

After a shuttle ride down to the surface, I headed straight to my home, finding Ahsoka was already there, tucked in bed and sleeping soundly. I quickly joined her, doing my best to crawl into bed beside her without waking her up.

The following morning, after checking in via my comms with the grounded portions of my secret, anti Mara Jade project, I settled in to working on some enchanting. It had been a while since I had gotten any done, and with our group constantly growing, I was already starting to fall behind my quota. I spent nearly a week and a half splitting my time between enchanting, my magic, and my duties around the city and in orbit.

For enchanting, I focused more on dexterity enhancements, as our starfighter complements were increasing steadily, and I wanted every single member of every single squadron to have access to my creations. My pilots had already received the best training possible from a mix of Mandalorian, Clone, and other hired instructors, while the amulets and rings I gave them turned them into demons in space.

The fact that Maru was providing them the best ships we could was only another layer to their power. Honestly, the only thing keeping them from being the best starfighter squadrons in the galaxy, in my humble opinion, was our shortage of proton and concussion missiles. When we finally had a reliable source of those...

Well, let's just say I might start actually feeling bad at our targets.

While my focus was on dexterity enhancement jewelry, I knew I was likely to be running into a significant shortage of armor enhancements. While not all of the considerable group of clones in orbit would be joining, I had some confidence in my abilities to recruit people by now, and even a small portion of a group that large would require some significant numbers to equip. Of course, not all of those who joined would be jumping into military service, but again, the group was large enough that even a small percentage made it worth warning Pola and our armor division that we might be hitting a rush soon.

On top of my enchanting, I also worked on my magic, taking on a new spell project. While I had, up to this point, managed to hold my own against the Dark Force users we had run into, I knew that facing Vader, Palpy, or several other threats was most likely beyond me, even with the enhancements on my armor. I needed a way to further enhance myself.

Luckily, I had a solid base to work from in terms of buffing strength, dexterity, and stamina. My plan was to stack the three effects into one spell, set it as a constant drain so that I could engage it and leave it, allowing me to focus on fighting. I also wanted to be able to dual cast it, so I had a choice of scale. Casting it one-handed would mean a lesser effect, but slower Magicka drain, while dual casting would create more of a drain, but fortify me even more.

That said, even with the options of potency, I needed to make sure that the drain on mana was reasonable. Having all the strength in the world was useless if it only lasted for half a second.

In between enchanting, visiting the clones, and working with Sheora to find more jobs for the rest of the groups, I puzzled and toiled over the new spell. I was still relying heavily on trial and error, but every time I made a spell, I gained a deeper understanding of the process. I still had a while to go before it was routine, but progress was progress.

When I finally cracked the code and finished the spell, I was more than happy with the results. By my estimation, the single-hand cast added another ten percent increase to my overhaul enhancement, while dual casting was closer to twenty, maybe even twenty-five. Both were significant increases, and when I used them, I consistently beat Ahsoka in our duals, especially when I dual-casted the spell. The best part was that it wasn't even that much of a mana hog. The single-hand cast consumed my regen rate and a slow trickle of my reserves, lasting nearly five minutes. The dual casting drank much deeper, two minutes of uptime.

As long as I didn't cast any other magic.

Just about the time I was finishing my spell, Cal decided it was time to go back to his group and discuss the possibility of joining us on Nirn. He collected a few holographic messages from Various Jedi Masters, as well as from Ahsoka and I, discussing the terms and stipulations of joining, as well as how much everyone loved living on Nirn in general. We lent him a decent-sized freighter as a gift, with a hold full of supplies and fresh fruit, as well as a hundred thousand credits.

Even if they didn't decide to join us, I wanted to make sure they understood that we were supporting them. Now was not the time to be stingy, and I desperately wanted them to be safe, and the best way to do that was to remove the need for them to take risks.

Between all of that work, and a good chunk of downtime as well, enough time passed that the secret project I sent my people on was finally completed.

It was time to bring Mara Jade to Nirn.

The first step involved me jumping into a speeder and heading off to Z-base, our off-site landing area for Skyforged starships. At the moment, only a few ships were landed there, and only one of them was my target.

Only a day after we left for our mission to rescue Cal, an off-brand cargo ship, bought cheaply for hauling goods for our transport and supplies division, had been commandeered for this project instead. As it was, the starship was far from what I would consider ready to be part of our fleet, with its shields, weapons, power, and thrusters needing a sizable upgrade. What it did have was a very robust life support and environmental control system, designed to safely transport a variety of sensitive contents. It was also tall, with plenty of empty space and large cargo elevators.

Our engineers, along with an *army* of droids, all under the direct guidance of Miru, completely tore apart the midsection of the ship, replacing it with a heavily modified, pre-made biome pod system. It was sealed from the rest of the ship, fed by the ship's life support, and, at the moment, completely empty.

[The ship, now renamed the *Quiet Ark*](#), was slow, under-armed, under-shielded, and low on power. But it was big, and it could hold a not insignificant chunk of wildlife inside it, in conditions that were exactly the same as those of the planet it came from.

Hopefully.

With the ship done, a task I was immensely impressed with, as putting it together had been a significant undertaking, the *Hope* and the *Wonder* were assigned as its escorts as we took off from the plant, most of 1st Group either inside the *Hope's* hangars or flying alongside it.

Our destination was a relatively unknown planet, at least by this galaxy's standards. It had a local native species that mostly kept to itself, as well as a large criminal population, who took advantage of several specific aspects of the planet's flora to hide from scanners. While we had been working to reach Cal and Mara, I sent Corvak there to infiltrate and take over the most extensive criminal base they could find. This newly acquired space would serve as a staging location for the second phase of my plan.

It was time to do a little gardening.

As we dropped out of hyperspace, I was standing on the bridge of the *Hope* with Ahsoka and Vaz.

"Are you sure?" I asked Ahsoka for probably the tenth time. "I don't doubt you can handle it, but it's probably going to suck."

"If we are going to be subjecting people to this, I should be familiar with how it feels," She insisted, giving me a look. "Worst case, I take a shuttle back up to the *Hope*."

"Alright, I get it," I said, doing my best to relent despite my worry. "In that case... Welcome to [Myrkr](#), a hell for those reliant on the Force."

The planet was a verdant, green world, covered in thick forests, all of which contained a higher-than-normal metal content, making huge swaths of the forest completely unscannable. These forests were filled with dangerous mysteries, including a species that *hunted using the Force*.

Another reason I really didn't want Ahsoka to accompany us to the surface.

Of course, what I was really interested in wasn't the canine-esque predators that somehow used the Force to hunt their prey, called [Vornskr](#). What I was after was what they hunted, specifically the [Ysalamiri](#), a small lizard-like creature that lived in a particular tree, the name of which I did not know. The symbiotic creatures attached themselves to these trees and repelled the Force in a bubble around them. The more ysalamiri, the larger the bubble. The trees were incredibly sensitive, as were the ysalamiri, making them exceedingly difficult to transplant or cultivate elsewhere.

Unless, of course, you knew the secret and had a trick up your sleeve.

You see, Myrkr was the site of a vast space battle during the war between the Mandalorians and the Old Republic. During that battle, hundreds, if not thousands, of ships crashed onto the surface of the planet, raising the concentration of heavy metal, particularly beskar, to incredibly high levels. This was why the foliage was so metal-dense, and potentially why such strange creatures like the vornskt and the ysalamiri existed.

The trees that hosted the ysalamiri grew in groves, some small and some quite large. These groves correlated to high beskar concentrations, as the ancient Mandalorian ships below them deteriorated, feeding the groves above them. Essentially, if we wanted to keep the trees and their ysalamiri occupants alive, without transporting mass amounts of soil from the planet, we would need to fertilize the trees with something like beskar-infused fertilizers.

The specifics, such as concentration, other aspects of soil composition, temperature ranges, humidity scales, and all other metrics required for the trees to thrive, would be gathered by a few ecological specialists we already had on hand for planning our farming endeavors.

We rode a shuttle down to the location cleared by Corvak, a surprisingly large base that was already being stripped down for supplies and materials, which were being shipped away by the Salvage Fleet. We landed not far from where the *Quiet Ark* landed, which itself was along the outer rim of their landing pad, closest to the treeline.

As we exited the shuttle, I could see Ahsoka looking towards the treeline, an unnerved expression on her face.

"I can actually feel the gaps in my senses," She said, a shiver running up her back, strong enough for me to notice. "You were right, it is disconcerting."

Before I could say anything, definitely not "I told you so," Corvak approached us, shaking my hand with a smile.

"Good to see you, Boss," He said. "The initial mission went well, and we managed to take down the base with minimal casualties. Early looks say we got about a million in supplies, if we include weapons and other bits."

"I love it when missions pay for themselves," I smirked. "Let the Salvage Fleet know standard salvage rules apply. Anything rare sticks with us, everything else gets stored to sell."

"I will," he responded with a nod. "And before you ask, as far as we can tell, this base is not owned by Talon Karrde."

Talon Karrde was one of several people, similar to Mara Jade, whom I was hesitant to mess with, for no other reason than he really seemed to have plot armor in all of the stories. He was always portrayed as super competent, and while he appeared vaguely respectable, for a smuggler at least, ruining one of his bases was not something I wanted to do, not when there was a choice. The fact that we were dealing with Mara Jade, someone whose story was tied to his, was also a concern. I did not want to tempt the Force into pushing and guiding things to happen.

Talon Karrde was also one of the few people to figure out how to keep the ysalamiri and their host tree alive after transplant. Considering how rare beskar is, I have to assume he was hauling dirt from Myrkr around to keep the concentrations right.

"Great, that's good to hear," I said with a nod, patting Corvak's shoulder. "Have you found any of the little lizards?"

"We've found two nearby groves of trees, each with communities of ysalarimi. The first is cleared, and we are cutting our way to the second as we speak."

"Alright. We can afford to wait a little while," I said. "Reach out to the *Hope*, let them know to contact the *Starcaller*. Provide them with a timetable and a meeting location. In the meantime, have the work crews start shifting dirt from the first location into the *Quiet Ark*. I know they've probably heard this a million times already from the experts, but be careful not to disturb the trees with actual Ysalamiri on them, and keep an eye out for predators."

"We have people on guard around-the-clock, both on any workers and any civilians that leave the ships or base," he assured me. "We've seen a few interesting things, but nothing that's gotten too close to really be a threat."

"Good to hear," I said with a nod. "Alright. Let's go see the first grove. I wanna see the little lizard bastard we are using so many resources on."