

As Amescoll described the woman he had seen, a sinking sensation started to form in the pit of my stomach. It was the description of her not being dark, despite being Force sensitive and working for the Empire, that really caught my attention. As far as I knew, only one woman had been labeled in that manner explicitly.

"I really hope I'm not right about this," I muttered to myself, shaking my head. "Did the woman have red hair? Green eyes?"

"Yes! She did, do you know of her?" He asked, his eyes going wide.

"Possibly," I said with a frown. "If I were to say her initials are MJ, does that help bring your memory back a bit?"

"MJ... MJ... "

Amescoll closed his eyes, taking a deep breath as he focused. For a long moment, he remained silent, sitting in his chair, lost in his memory. Finally, after nearly a minute, he opened his eyes.

"Jade. Her name... I think it was Jade," He responded with a frown. "I'm sorry, I wish I could be more helpful.

"Oh, don't worry, you've been plenty helpful," I assured him. "That can only be one person, Mara Jade, Hand of the Emperor. One of a few, though they don't know that. She is a Force-sensitive infiltrator, saboteur, spy, and just about whatever else you could ask for."

"What's the problem then, Deacon?" Ahsoka asked, my partner feeling my rising stress through our connection.

"Mara Jade is tough, effective, wily, and capable," I explained with a curse before letting out a long breath, shaking my head before rubbing my face. "She is exactly the kind of agent that the Rebellion fears. That makes me nervous. Normally, I would use this opportunity to kill her and be done with it, but I did *not* want to kill Mara Jade."

"Why not?" Ahsoka asked, clearly anticipating some extra knowledge.

"Like Amescoll said, Mara isn't evil," I explained. "She works personally on the word of Palpy, learning from him and being brainwashed in the process. She buys the whole propaganda line, that the Galaxy was in chaos and only a true leader with an iron fist could bring order and peace, that the Rebellion is made of anarchists looking to spread chaos and profit from it. Between that and the brainwashing, she believes she is on the right side of justice. She isn't delusional, she understands that the Empire isn't squeaky clean, but she sees herself and the darker actions as necessary tools to keep order."

"That... Sounds like you really don't want her dead," Sheora commented. "That's not good, because the easiest way to deal with people like her, the super spy agents who specialize in everything, is to kill them. Sometimes multiple times."

"She... She could be a potent force for good," I revealed, chewing the inside of my cheek. "If she ever breaks through the brainwashing."

"And you want to do that?"

"I mean, if she fell into our laps? I would probably try," I admitted. "But hunting her down isn't the priority. I would just prefer not to kill her outright if possible. To give her that chance."

"We can cross the bridge when we come to it," Ahsoka pointed out. "But we need to move asap if we want to save Kestis from falling into a trap designed for us."

"Are you going to do the face thing again?" Sheora asked with a shiver. "I still don't think I've thanked you enough for enduring something like that to save the kids and me."

When Sheora and her, at the time, yet-to-be-adopted kids, Claron and Felia, needed rescuing, we were stuck on how to secretly infiltrate the planet. Eventually, we had settled on having our faces modified to hide our identities. It was an... unpleasant experience to say the least, and I was pretty sure the medical droid who performed the procedure on me had gotten my nose wrong, even if the pictures from before and after seem to match.

"I would prefer if we didn't do that," I responded seriously. "We can use the *Starcaller* to get to the surface. Even if we have to burn it or leave it behind, it's an easy trade."

"Is the *Starcaller* still clean?" Ahsoka asked. "We haven't been gentle using it."

"We've been keeping it busy running simple transport and cargo trips around the galaxy," Sheora assured her. "It's been long enough and bounced around the galaxy enough that its records should be clean enough for this."

"Good. Wake up the troops, we have another rescue mission to go on," I ordered, Ahsoka nodding and stepping out. "Sheora, find me everything you can on the planet and surrounding patrols, and any large gathering of Imperial ships or resources within any sort of jumping distance."

"Already on it," Sheora said with a nod. "I'll have a data dump for you to take with you before you leave."

I nodded, before turning to focus on Amescoll. He had recovered a lot since he had stumbled into my home, but he was still obviously shaken. I reached out and put my hands on his shoulder.

"I'll do my best to bring this guy in safely," I assured him. "Who knows, maybe he will even be able to bring in everyone he has been helping until now. For now, get back to the surface and let everyone know the situation. No doubt you scared a few people rushing off to see me looking like you shook hands with death."

Amescoll chuckled, taking a long breath before nodding.

"Thank you, Deacon," He said, reaching out to squeeze my hand. "I know I can trust you and your people to get this done and save Padawan Kestis."

The older Jedi left the room, leaving me to sit on the edge of one of the few desks in Sheora's large office. My brain had latched on to the Name Kestis, but I couldn't for the life of me put a face to the name. I was pretty sure he was the protagonist of one of the new Star Wars games, the ones I never really had time to play. It was honestly on my list of things to play once I could afford a solid gaming PC.

Now, I was stuck trying to puzzle out what was happening from a few trailers and short clips I saw. I was pretty sure Cal Kestis's story took place in the early days of the Rebellion, and he had fought several members of the Inquisitors. He had clearly survived, but I knew nothing about what had happened during those games, or after. I couldn't even envision his face... he might have been a redhead, now that I was thinking about it, but the classic kind rather than the natural dye job that Mara Jade had.

All that meant was that we were going to have to play it by ear, since I didn't really have much out-of-context knowledge about what was happening. Considering that Cal didn't exist in the Legends canon, and that it had been a while since his "story" would have happened, I had no idea what sort of state he would be in, or what amount would be canon to his "story." Not that it helped since I knew next to nothing about it.

I shook myself off, telling Sheora I was heading to the *Starcaller*, which was docked in one of the many private hangars that dotted the interior ring of *Boxi's Fury*. Already, people were tending to the ship, running over checklists and fueling her up. Ahsoka was there as well, as was Racer and a small group of beskar BXs. There was enough room in the *Starcaller's* various smuggling compartments for all of us, as well as a few strategically disassembled battle droids, which could seriously come in handy.

"The rest of the crew should be up here within fifteen minutes," Ahsoka said as I approached. The ship should be ready in half an hour. 3rd Group on the other hand... It's going to take a few hours."

"What's the Force telling you?" I asked, patting the top of Racer's dome. "Getting anything from it?"

"It feels urgent," she admitted, biting her lip in concern. "Like we are on a tight schedule."

".... then we should leave before 3rd Group is ready to leave with us," I said. "They will get there eventually and can support us when they do. And we will push the *Starcaller* as hard as we can. As long as it makes it to the planet fast, that's all that matters."

She nodded in agreement, heading into the ship to speed up its prep, while I got on the comms with the captains of the 3rd Group. It was a significant commitment to bring everyone together on one mission, but if this was truly an ambush for us, then we might need them.

Unfortunately, there was a solid chance that this was less of an ambush and more of a trick. With Mata Jade posing as a Jedi, or at least someone Force-sensitive, the goal could be to infiltrate the Skyforged. That was one of her specialties, after all. If that were the case, resistance would be enough to challenge us, but not enough to stop us from leaving.

I cursed once I got off the comms with the captains of 3rd Group, hating that we were relying on spotty possibilities rather than hard facts. Either way, we would have to survive on the ground for long enough for our fleet to arrive and support us. Even then, we would need to make a quick escape if they showed up with a fleet built to shut us down.

Within thirty minutes, everyone had arrived and piled into the *Starcaller*, spreading out through the ship as best we could. The *Starcaller* was an impressive [starship](#), heavily modified to be the best it could be, but it was not designed to hold a full six people, an Astromech, and a bunch of battle droids.

At least not with most of them hiding in the smuggler's holds.

Once everyone was ready, we immediately left the *Fury* behind. We headed to our jump point, our impressive fleet preparing behind us, shuttles ferrying people around from ship to ship, as well as to and from Vercopa. With any luck, 3rd Group would be ready to leave within a few hours.

After we made the jump to lightspeed, I called everyone down to the *Starcaller's* cargo hold, where Nal and Vaz were already working on storing the BXs in their spot, disassembling some of them in the process. When we landed, the whole units would reassemble the partially disassembled units, and be ready for whatever missions we could need them for.

When everyone was gathered, I started explaining the mission.

"And this Force Visions... how reliable are they?" Julius asked, scratching his cheek.

"From someone like Amescoll, pretty dependable," I assured him. "If he were younger, with less experience, I might be more concerned, but Amescoll knows the difference between being sent something through the Force and a nightmare."

"And they can't be faked?"

"No, they come-" Ahsoka started to deny, when I winced and put my hand on her shoulder.

"In this situation, no," I answered, Ahsoka looking at me with a raised eyebrow. "There have been instances of Sith possibly, maybe feeding false visions to people they have frequent contact with, or maybe adjusting or messing with a Force Vision in general, but in this case, that is very unlikely."

"So the intel is good. What's the plan?" Tatnia asked, as Julius leaned back, at least mostly satisfied with my answers.

"The plan is to ride the Starcaller to the surface, leave for the city, and find Mara Jade first, since Cal Kestis will be looking for her," I explained. "Once we find her, we wait. Now, keep in mind, when we do find Jade, in all likelihood, she will know. We can pretend to be skittish for a while, but if this is an ambush designed to trap us on the planet, that is the most likely trigger point."

"At which point we have a repeat of our previous rescue mission," Tatnia points out. "The one where we had to dodge a planetary bombardment from a Star Destroyer."

"Out of everything, I don't think we need to worry about that," I assured them. "Mara Jade might not be nearly as important as she thinks she is, but she is still a spy working directly under the Emperor. They won't risk pissing him off unless we piss them off first."

"So her goal is to lure us into a trap or to bait us into taking her away with us," Vaz confirmed. "What exactly is our objective?"

"Our primary and most important mission, beyond getting captured ourselves, is to prevent Cal Kestis from being captured," I explained. "He might be a powerful Jedi, but if he gets brought in front of Grandpa Palpy... He won't last long. Which means the potential safe haven for Force sensitives he may have set up is at risk. I would... Also, I prefer that we don't kill Mara Jade in the process. If you have to choose between her and one of us, then so be it, but... she has the potential to do a lot of good in the future."

"Boss... I'm not sure I'm comfortable with that," Julius said, rubbing the back of his head. "She may be cool eventually... but if we have her dead to rights and we let her go, then everyone she kills from here until potential future is on our heads."

I stared at Julius for a long moment before cursing, mentally slapping my forehead. He was absolutely correct, and that was not a burden I could ask them to take on. Hell, now that he pointed it out, I didn't like it either. I knew she had the potential to be a great Jedi, and I was working very hard *not* to think about Luke and Miru, but until the Emperor was dead, she would continue to be his agent, doing his bidding.

"Capturing her is possible," Nal pointed out.

"That... is true if she is trying to come with us," I admitted. "If she is trying to get us killed, not so easy."

"Is she really that skilled?" Tatnia asked. "Or is this more of that Princess Leia thing when you first met her?"

I winced as Tatnia brought up an old memory. I had always been impressed by the power and drive of Princess Leia when I was younger, not to mention holding more than a slight crush. When I first met her, I might have overreacted slightly, explaining to Tatnia how amazing she was. After multiple meetings, as well as sitting on the opposite side of the negotiation table, I realized that while she was impressive, she fell far short of the pedestal I had originally placed her on. I couldn't help but wince as Ahsoka looked at me with a raised eyebrow.

"She is capable, someone who is good enough that I would be concerned. That, plus her strength in the Force, makes a concerning combination," I explained. "If we can capture her, we should, but I'm not sure we will get that opportunity."

In truth, I was more worried about just how much plot armor the Force was going to give her. Was she destined to be a great Jedi, and therefore able to pull incredible feats of skill and inspiration from the Force? Or would we steamroll her with a combination of numbers, beskar, and surprise?

Still, my agreeing that we would do something about her if given the opportunity seemed to mollify my team. We continued to talk about the mission, eventually diving into the information that Sheora gave us on the surrounding imperial assets. We had two days to prepare, and I intended to make the most of every second.