

Sheora was short on details as she led us through the Rebel stronghold, eventually entering a turbolift that took us quite a few levels down. When we stepped out of the small space, it was a short walk to a heavily reinforced room. Sheora pressed a button on the side, activating some sort of PA system. A male voice came through, and Sheora responded with a passcode. A few seconds later, the door unlocked, and we stepped through.

My first thought as we stepped in was that the room had the same essence of opulence I remembered from the very first CIS base we raided, but it had clearly been stripped down. The walls showed signs of art and drapes hanging against them, but they now stood bare. Even the floor has been pulled up, some sort of flooring or carpet. In the place of that art and opulence were various bits of tech and computer systems.

At the center of the room was an intricately carved table with four people sitting along one side. General Syndulla, Princess Leia, General Draven, and Mon Mothma. The first two gave me a small smile and a nod while General Draven looked at me with clear suspicion and barely restrained frustration. Mon Mothma... she had that same austere, almost ethereal calmness that she had in the original trilogy. It was almost unnerving.

"Thank you, Agent Sheora," General Draven said. "Please wait outside."

Sheora frowned but nodded, mouthing an apology as she left the room. I suppose it made sense that the Head of Intelligence was the infiltrator's direct boss. As Sheora stepped outside, I gave Ahsoka another look, the Togruta letting out a long breath before stepping forward to the table. As we approached, I pulled out a seat for her before sitting down on my own.

"It's good to see some friendly faces," I said, nodding to Princess Leia and General Syndulla. "I'm also flattered to get the attention of the leader of the Rebellion. I didn't think we had reached that level of notoriety quite yet."

"Truly?" Mon Mothma asked, seeming surprised. "The procurement of Omega Station, the droid repair facility, as well as this very stronghold... not to mention *Huntress*, the yet to be named *Braha'tok* Gunship, various supplies and and starfighters, the rescue of Agent Sheora and her two wards..."

"That doesn't include your own personal fame among the troops," General Syndulla pointed out. "After what you did for the wounded during the rescue of Yavin IV, you're almost as famous as Luke."

"Seriously? Huh... I guess I hadn't really listed it all together in my head before," I admitted, ignoring Ahsoka's strangled scoff from beside me. "Besides, most of those were joint efforts."

"Perhaps, but they are still impressive," The older politician insisted.

I looked at everyone seated on the opposite side of the table before finally realizing what was going on.

"Oh, I see. I might not be very good at the whole politics thing, but I can tell when I'm being buttered up," I said with a smirk, looking at Princess Leia. "I assume you told them my offer?"

"I did. As you can imagine, they are *very* interested," She explained.

"A supply of beskar, even a small one, would be an incredible boon to the Rebellion," Mon Mothma said. "We would be very interested in settling on a contract with you."

"Well... as I see it, there are two ways for this to work," I explained. "One, we plan something together, combining resources and hit the Empire or maybe a pirate band. My team has discussed hitting a Hutt for our next heist, but I doubt you would appreciate that."

"No, the Rebellion cannot afford to anger the Hutts," Mon Mothma said, leaning forward in a slight show of urgency.

"Well, if we find another source of precious metals, we can put that off for a while," I assured her. "Though, in all likelihood, we will be hitting a Hutt called Grakkus in the next few weeks."

"Why?" General Draven asked, looking confused. "They are usually more trouble than they are worth. They tend to diversify their wealth, so robbing them is usually pointless."

"Not all of them," I pointed out, but waved off his response. "We wouldn't be stealing wealth from him. Grakkus collects Jedi artifacts, things that could really help Luke, Felia, and Ahsoka in their training."

"Ezra as well," Ahsoka added.

"And Ezra as well," I repeated, pointing at my Togruta friend in confirmation. "Not to mention any Force-sensitives that come after them. If the Empire finds out he is collecting Jedi artifacts, they will come down on him like a sack of bricks, and destroy everything they get their hands on."

Before Mon Mothma, or anyone else for that matter, could respond, General Draven cut in. He leaned forward and nearly barked out his question.

"Why your determination to help the Jedi?" He asked, peering at me harshly. "It doesn't benefit you in the slightest besides making them indebted to you."

"There is no such thing as a debt between friends," I responded, continuing before he could retort. "But you strike me as the kind of man who doesn't understand that, so I'll explain it another way. All Force sensitives, no matter their age, species, or general disposition, will always have to contend with the draw of the Dark Side of the Force. Most healthy, well-adjusted, supported, and educated people can resist."

I paused for a moment to let my words sink in. I could see Mon Mothma give General Syndulla a small, receiving the smallest nod of confirmation.

"Now, I might not agree with many aspects of the old Jedi Order, but their teachings can serve as a strong, light-leaning foundation for whatever comes next," I explained, looking at each of the Rebel leaders before focusing on Mon Mothma. "Without that, we risk further generations being slipping into the dark because as terrible as it is to admit, the Dark Side of the Force is easier, more tempting, and initially more powerful than the light."

The sudden dialogue explaining how the Force worked seemed to catch the others off guard, though I had to assume Ahsoka was getting used to me by now.

"Imagine in ten years, after the defeat of the Empire. Imagine random dark Jedi, little mini Darth Vaders, popping up every few months," I explained. "Taking over planets, trying to topple whatever government you create after this, their self-importance and greed inflated by the Dark Side. All because we brushed off the needs of the few trained Jedi still alive. Mark my words, unless you plan on murdering every Force-sensitive that pops up, you are going to want to invest in the Jedi and let them do their own thing. Let them be free, let them do their work, and keep them funded because a galaxy without the Jedi gathering together is chaos."

For a long moment, all four people on the other side of the table stared at me. Judging from the looks of horror on their faces, they were clearly imagining the scenario I had proposed. Ahsoka, who was used to my sudden revelations, was marginally more controlled in her reaction.

"So, we were discussing beskar?" I asked after a full minute, which seemed to at least pull Mon Mothma, experienced politician that she was, out of her contemplation.

"Yes, I believe you were voicing your suggestions?"

"Right. We can work together, hit something, and split the loot fifty-fifty, or you guys can do the work at your own pace. Then I'll take the precious metals, use them to make beskar, and take thirty-five percent for myself."

Draven opened his mouth to argue about the twenty-five percent figure, but Mon Mothma sent him a look that immediately shut him up.

"... perhaps a mix of both," Mon Mothma suggested, turning back to me. "If we put out to our many cells that precious metals, taken from reasonable sources, will be rewarded with increased resources and equipment, I believe we could gather a not insignificant amount on our own. However, that will be a slower process, so finding our own target for a joint mission would provide us with an immediate solution."

"That... sounds pretty smart to me," I agreed with a shrug. "I know that my team would be happy to work with the Rebel Alliance to secure more beskar. We just need a target."

"Alliance Intelligence is already working on finding an appropriate source," Mon Mothma assured me, nodding to General Draven. "However, I would like to negotiate on the thirty-five percent. If the Rebel Alliance is securing the materials, I believe fifteen percent is more appropriate."

"Fifteen isn't enough for it to even be worth it for us," I responded, shaking my head. "Thirty percent."

"Twenty-five, and you will get to keep sixty percent of what we get during our heist," Mon Mothma stated, trading immediate profits for a better cut later.

"...Fine, as long as it stays under a certain amount," I explained. "While I'm happy to armor your commandos with beskar, releasing too much of this stuff is a bad idea. Not because I'm worried about you guys having too much, but because the Empire is going to really stop fucking around if they notice all your troops are wearing it."

"That... is a wise sentiment. We will set a certain poundage amount per month. Is that acceptable?"

We negotiated back and forth on the poundage per month before finally settling on reasonable terms. We would get twenty-five percent of whatever they brought to us and sixty percent of the joint heist. They would provide us with enough precious metals to make twenty pounds of beskar a month, and we would keep five of it. If they couldn't acquire enough metal, the split would remain the same, with smaller amounts.

When the negotiations were over, I was prepared to leave when Mon Motha switched topics.

"With that bit of business finished, I would like to inquire of your plans for the future," She said, both General Draven and Princess Leia leaning forward. "What are the plans of the Skyforged Vanguard?"

"Growth," I said simply. "My team and I will continue to grow, pushing back against the Empire and eliminating pirates and slavers whenever we can. I want our fleet to grow, our commando units to increase."

"And your dealings with the Rebel Alliance?" She asked. "They will continue?"

"As long as you continue to deal fairly with us, we will continue to be fair in return," I assured her. "More than fair in most circumstances. The pricing on your latest purchase, the gunship, proves that."

"It does, and we thank you for your charitable dealings," She agreed with a nod, continuing a moment after. "But I was specifically talking about joint operations, working directly with us."

"Oh. Well, as long as a mission benefits both of us, or we find a way to make a profit off of it, it's an easy sell to my team," I explained. "Pro-bono work is a bit more difficult for me to sell to my second in command, but as Sheora's rescue can attest, we can be convinced if the cause is enough."

"I see. And how would we offer you missions?" She asked with a raised eyebrow. "You have to understand that as a military, we don't usually post our assignments for people to pick and choose."

"Then assign us a liaison," I suggested with a shrug. "Someone who takes orders from someone who knows what's going on. They can work with us to keep us in the loop, and we can work with them to take on assignments that benefit us both. Just... make sure we don't get another Loc situation."

"Of course, a fair idea." Mon Mothma said. "I think General Syndulla could serve as a point of contact with your liaison, and perhaps someone else you've worked with before for the actual role?"

"That sounds reasonable to me."

We talked for a little while longer, discussing the parameters of what I would consider acceptable missions. Mon Mothma left shortly after discussing the liaison idea, with General Draven following her out of the room. After basically outlining the idea of what was acceptable, we broke up the gathering.

"I'm glad this was an amicable meeting," I said, shaking General Syndulla's and Princess Leia's hands. "Though I get the feeling that Draven wished it wasn't."

"He... well, he takes his job seriously," Princess Leia explained politely. "He only wants what's best for the Rebellion."

"He is aggressive because he believes it is up to him to be suspicious of everything," The General explained, pulling no punches. "In his mind, we are all naive idealists among violent thugs, all of them just waiting for the opportunity to infiltrate and destroy us."

"I know the type," Ahsoka said with a smirk. "Had to work with them before."

With the meeting over, Ahsoka and I quickly said our goodbyes, exiting the meeting room to find Sheora waiting for us. She looked a little annoyed that she had been waiting for so long but thankful she didn't point that annoyance at us.

"How did it go?" She asked.

"Well enough," Ahsoka responded vaguely.

"Your boss is an ass," I said a moment later, getting a snort of laughter from the woman, and a look from Ahsoka.

"He can be," She admitted. "He doesn't pretend he isn't, though. He is also very good at his job."

We made our way back down to the living quarters, where Felia and Caldor were waiting. Sheora helped them finish packing before walking down with us out of the main structure, stopping at the boarding ramp of the *Starcaller*.

"Now, I want you two to behave," she said, kneeling down in front of her wards. "I wish I could come with you, but I have a feeling that I'm going to end up being briefed for a new job soon. I will meet you both at Omega Station."

Both of the younger kids gave their relatively new guardian a hug before climbing into the ship. I could hear Luke introducing himself as I looked at Sheora.

"Did your boss say something?" I asked, referring to the opening for a liaison.

"He did," She admitted. "He is going to recommend me at Mon Mothma's request. According to her, keeping Felia and Ahsoka together so she can help with her Force-sensitivity is a good idea. Plus, I was planning on moving to Omega Station anyway, assuming your offer was still on the table."

"Of course it is," I agreed.

"Good," She said, trailing off for a moment before focusing on me. "Listen, I know I can trust you to keep them safe, but I wouldn't be a good guardian if I didn't tell you to keep them safe anyway. If they get hurt, I'll hunt you down and feed you your own limbs."

I snorted at her threat, not doubting her claim for a moment. It was clear she cared about the kids, and I wasn't dumb enough to question the capabilities of a parent. We finished our goodbyes before climbing into the ship. We spent a few minutes getting the kids settled and moving them into their rooms. Claron would be bunking with Luke, while Felia would be bunking with Ahsoka, which would be the first step in helping them be a bit more independent of each other.

Once everything was settled, we sat down in the cockpit and took off into the sky.