

I took a moment to gather my thoughts, scanning around the room. The troopers all looked healthy and hearty, clearly having recovered from their hibernation sickness. It was hard to tell, but they did also look a few years younger. According to Ahsoka, that was a side-effect of being cured of their accelerated healing.

After a moment, Lieutenant Rider, whom I recognized because of a tattoo on his neck, stood from where he was sitting and made his way over. As he stopped in front of me, he started to raise his hand in a salute, only to stop himself midway with a frown.

"Greeting, sir," He said. "I... Well- We..."

"I heard you wanted to join up," I said, helping the trooper out. "I gotta admit, I was hoping a few of you would be interested in the idea, but I thought I was going to have to make the offer myself. And I didn't think there would be nearly this many of you."

"Sorry about that, Sir. When we started discussing our options, I mention searching you out, seeing if you would be open to me joining up," He explained. "I asked if anyone wanted to join me, and... well quite a few of us did."

"Can I ask why?" I asked. "I'm happy to have you, but I would have thought that any of you who still wanted to fight would be joining the Rebellion."

"It was an option. Some of us even took it," he admitted. "Honestly, Sir, reasons vary, but generally... We were born to fight, Sir. It's all we know, whether we are ground troopers or naval officers. But... with how the last war turned out, and with the biochip... we just aren't ready to join up with another army. We wanted something different, and from what we were able to learn about you and your group... you are different."

"We are," I agreed, looking over at Allum before focusing back on the lieutenant. "You do realize as mercenaries, you will be paid for jobs you participate in, not a salary? We will cover living expenses, armor, and weapons, as well as basic entertainment needs, but in exchange, pay comes from working on jobs and missions."

"What about those of us who don't wish to fight?" He asked now looking slightly concerned. "We have several troopers who are hoping to retire from full time combat, but still wish to help..."

"To be honest? I don't know," I admit with a frown, crossing my arms. "This is a step past what we were before, so things are going to have to change."

For a moment, the room was silent as I tried to puzzle out what my next step would be. When nothing popped into my head immediately, I decided it was time for any leader's trump card. Delegation.

"Lieutenant Rider, I need you to collate the concerns, needs, and wants of all of these men," I said, catching the leader off guard. "Find out what they are looking for from joining the Skyforged Vanguard and what skills they have. When you're done, find a few of your people to represent your group. Then, we will meet to discuss the next step of the Skyforged Vanguard."

Lieutenant Rider's expression changed from concern to interest and finally to excitement as I explained his task to him. As cannon fodder for the Galactic Republic, the clone troopers rarely got the opportunity to engage in important discussions and influence outcomes. Now, I was giving him the chance to sit at the table as equals, which must have been a new and exciting concept.

"I can do that for you, Sir," He said confidently, drawing himself up. "How many representatives should I bring?"

"Enough to cover the different groups," I answered with a shrug. "Use your best judgement, Rider."

"I will, Sir."

"Good. Let's give you... five hours? A late lunch meeting, how does that sound?" I asked, getting a quick nod in agreement. "Good. I will see you then. Allum, you going to stay behind?"

"Yeah, Boss, I might be able to answer some of their questions."

"Alright, good luck."

I gave the group a wave before heading out of the room. When the door shut behind me, I wilted quite a bit, sagging under the new weight of our latest problem. I had not expected something like this to happen, to thrust us from a small crew to a group of over forty. I knew we would eventually grow to this size, or at least hope to grow to this size and even past it, but I never saw jumping to that size all at once.

After a long moment, I shook my head and stood up straight, tugging on my uniform. This was a lot, but if I had learned anything over the last few months, it was that I could trust my crew to keep me rock steady under whatever we got saddled with.

I made my way back to the main hangar, getting in touch with Tatnia and Nal, as well as finding Miru and Vakim. I wanted everyone to know about the meeting, to at least give them the option to sit in, but there wasn't much point in everyone going either.

When everything was set up, I immediately headed to the *Chariot*. I had just under four hours, and I was going to spend every but of that time sleeping. The last couple of days, riding the *Demanding Fury*, constantly having to keep an eye on the locked-up crew, and even Senita

and Distani, had really tired me out. If I was going to have to handle a restructuring of our entire group, reorganizing it to include thirty new clone troopers, I needed a bit to unwind and rest.

I woke up three and half hours later, having just enough time to step into the sonic shower before heading out into Omega Station. Nal had found a [conference room](#), one that was functional and nearby the main hangar. It was a simple circular room with a circular meeting table in the middle. There were datapad sockets, charging ports, and holoprojector for each spot, but they were flush with the table. There were also several couch-like seats around the central table directly against the wall.

I arrived just a few minutes before the arranged meeting time, entering the room to find Nal, Tatnia and Vakim had already sat down. Vaz, Pola, and Miru were sitting down on one of the large couches. I made my way over and sat between Nal and Tatnia, getting comfortable before looking at my second in command.

"By the way, congrats on the mission, Nia," I said with a smile, making sure to give Nal and Vaz a nod as well. "You guys did great on the *Huntress*. Sorry, I haven't had a chance to talk directly with you about it until now."

"It's fine, boss," She said, waving off my apology. "It went well, all things considered. Could have done with a less close call with the reactor room, but we just didn't see that coming."

"We will have to in the future," Nal said, shaking his head. "Knew Stormtroopers were more fanatical."

"There's a difference between knowing they are hardcore and knowing they are fucking crazy," I pointed out. "Can't expect to foresee everything. You guys handled it well, though. I'm going to pay out a few thousand credits to everyone who participated once this meeting is over"

Nal accepted the praise with a nod, while Tatnia smiled before changing the subject.

"Boss... Do you have any plans about what you're going to do with all these troopers?" She asked, seeming genuinely curious. It's a lot of people to suddenly be in charge of."

"I have a few ideas, but it really comes down to what sort of things the troopers are looking for," I admitted with a shrug. "Before you say anything, I'm not going to be handing out charity. I will help where we can, but I'm not paying a clone out to try his hand at being a florist."

She chuckled, but lost the chance to respond when Lieutenant Rider arrived, two other clones following him in. Again, I could see Lieutenant Rider tensing, his hand shifting as he was about to salute, only to catch himself just before he did. I stood and gestured to some of the seats across from us.

"Gentleman, please take a seat," I said with a smile.

"Thank you, Sir," Lieutenant Rider said, both of his compatriots nodding along with him. "We wanted to start by saying thank you for including us in this process."

"Of course," I said with a nod, sitting down as all three newcomers claimed their seats. This is a big step forward, and I want to make sure we are all on the same page. I know this is uncharted ground for your men as well, so the need to communicate is even more critical. Now, introductions?"

I introduced the crew that was present before Lieutenant Rider introduced both of his compatriots, Flip and Toggle. Flip was a medic who, during his time working at the station, served under the two doctors who ran the station's two separate medbays. He was representing the troopers who wished to help but weren't looking to be in direct combat. He personally wanted to continue performing medicine, becoming more than just a particularly well-trained combat medic.

Toggle, on the other hand, was a starfighter pilot, one of a handful that were looking to join. He represented the clones trained to pilot or perform other duties on various starships, of which there were nineteen in total.

Lieutenant Rider represented the clones who were primarily ground troops, of which there were eight, nine including himself. I was a little shocked at first at the low number of ground-based combatants, but then I realized that on a space station, it made sense there weren't many ground troops.

Once introductions were complete, we began to discuss how inducting the clones into the Skyforged Vanguard would work. The first discussion we had was what exactly the clones could bring to the table and what exactly they were looking to do.

As we talked, it quickly became apparent that we had enough people to staff the *Demanding Fury*, as well as replace a few bridge droids on the *Intervention* and *Chariot* with clones, as long as we kept using droids to assist with gunner stations, manual labor, and maintenance. We also were able to replace Pola as the *Interventions* head engineer, as he was truly enjoying the armor-making process and wanted to focus on improving ours even more. Considering that all of our newcomers would at least need one pair of the beskar uniforms, he was already going to be pretty busy. Not to mention, he would now need to maintain them as well.

According to Flip, one of the non-combat clones would probably be very interested in joining his work, so we didn't even have to worry about him being overworked.

The pilots provided a different problem, as the *Chariot* could not fit the V-wings we had access to, but leaving them behind would be a waste of resources. The Rebels planned to rotate their own starfighter squadrons through the station as quasi-shore leave, so we didn't even need them to stay behind as protection.

All this meant that I wanted a way to transport them around so they could join our growing fleet. I desperately wanted biological pilots to work with our small droid starfighter fleet.

"Why don't you just buy another carrier?" Pola suggested, looking a bit nervous about speaking up. "Something we could fit the V-wings into."

"Are there any carriers in our price range?" I asked, settling my look on Nal. "Something we could afford or steal?"

"I'll look into it," Nal volunteered with a nod. "See if I can find a good match for us."

"Alright. And while that is happening, how would the pilots feel about taking a few people under their wings and training them up, especially on flying V-wings?" I asked. Having a fighter screen is crucial to a fleet's strength, so the more pilots we can field, the better. I'm already planning to have Miru figure out a way to put some shields on the V-wings so they can crush TIEs."

"We... would be okay with that, as long as they have some talent," Toggle agreed. "Training from scratch takes years, but getting someone who already has decent flying instinct up to higher standards is easier."

"Fantastic, that's something we can look into then. Nal, take that into account when you're looking for a carrier solution."

Happy to pass the buck, we tackled the next problem: how to pay the people who are not going on missions. We discussed it for a while, throwing around and subsequently throwing out several ideas. In the end, we decided to continue using the current model. The company would pay for living expenses and equipment, but completing missions earned you a payday. The caveat was that if someone ever felt like stepping back from active combat or their duties weren't something required on missions, they would be given a monthly stipend calculated by the Skyforged Vanguard's total income. It would definitely be less than what the combatants would be making, but it would be enough for them to save up or use to purchase personal luxuries. I was a bit hesitant to hook people so tightly to the group, but in the end, it made sense to do it that way, especially when they wouldn't have to pay rent for their own equipment. We did agree to give this pay model some time and that we would come back and discuss it to see if it worked the way we hoped or if it needed some finagling.

Surprisingly, by the time we finished going over what the clones were looking for, we managed to fill quite a few rolls that Nal and Tatnia decided we needed. We now had an experienced quartermaster who would be in charge of making sure we had food, ammo, and fuel, along with other necessities. We also had two pilots who would be running supply missions for us. We would most likely be buying a semi-decent and completely legitimate freighter, fixing it up a bit, and using it to go buy and transport supplies. Since that would be its only purpose,

the chances of it getting connected to us were low, meaning they wouldn't have to worry about getting snatched on. Even better, the two clones who express interest in that role would be okay with getting some cosmetic work done to hide their origins.

We also planned on opening at least one of the station's medical facilities, staffing it with a few clones led by Flip, the eager combat medic turned kinda sorta doctor. There was quite a bit of equipment we would most likely need, depending on the state of the two medbays. I was hoping we could salvage one to make the other fully functional, but that was probably unlikely.

By the end of the three-hour meeting, we had discussed and handled all of the issues we could think of. Some of the clones would work on our ships, mostly the *Demanding Fury*, which we may or may not rename. Others would work around the station to shore up our unsurprisingly lacking logistical infrastructure.

On top of that, the naval-focused clones would also help us train up any new recruits we had, which we would probably need soon, considering we planned on purchasing or otherwise acquiring at least one unassigned new ship, the carrier. Finally, the combat troopers would work with our already existing ground team under the leadership of Lieutenant Rider. They would be working out of either the *Intervention* or the *Demanding Fury*, depending on the situation. They could also go off on their own missions.

When the meeting was over, I shook hands with Rider, Toggle, and Flip, all three of whom looked incredibly excited at the agreement. I was also excited, though there was plenty of nervousness to go along with it. I was now in charge of more than forty people, with a quickly growing, if not still small-scale, fleet. Yes, this was exactly the direction I was hoping I would go, but that didn't make it any less nerve-wracking.