

The moment the second CR70 descended from the sky and began unloading on our ships, both of the previously landed slaver ships started to rise again. They had clearly been waiting for it to arrive to support their escape. I cursed and turned to the one of the crew, the one in charge of the raindrops.

"Deploy the raindrops!" I ordered. "Use them to force the transport and the first CR70 to stay on the ground! Everyone else, focus fire on the second CR70!"

My orders were relayed immediately, and barely twenty seconds later, all eight of the raindrops flew out of the hangar and began swirling around the lower ships, getting dangerously close. Immediately, the starships stopped ascending, their smaller weapons focusing on starfighters. Their larger weapons, as well as the higher CR70's weapons, began blasting away at the nearest ship, which just happened to be the *Talos Chariot*.

"*Chariot*, maintain fire, but move behind the lower cruisers aft, use its engine bank as cover," I ordered, having spotted something. "It looks like a dead zone for its weapon emplacements!"

Through the viewport, I could see the Chariot swing around, using its superior speed to stay behind the larger ship. As I predicted, while the higher starship could still easily attack it, the lower one couldn't target it with anything.

"*Loyal Hound*, what's your status?" I called out, the open comms sending my voice through to the starship.

"*Shields at seventy-five percent and dropping, sir!*" The voice of a clone responded. "*Seventy percent...*"

"Intervention! Status report!" I called out.

"*Shields at eighty-seven percent and dropping slowly, sir!*" Dazem's voice responded. "*Eighty five...*"

"*Loyal hound!* Fly up above the higher CR70, and use it as cover from the lower one!" I ordered. "*Intervention*, fly around and draw fire until your shields reach fifty percent!"

The battle continued, turbolaser blasts lighting up the bright white landscape. Both the *Loyal Hound* and the *Talos Chariot* were now in at least partial cover from one of the ships, and *Talos Chariot* was handling the remaining firepower with its upgraded shields. The lower starships, the transport, and the first CR70 were hovering barely a dozen feet off the ground, trying to avoid the dive bombing raindrops.

Unfortunately, the smaller droid ships had taken casualties, with three of the unmanned ships now burning wrecks on the icy ground. Thankfully, we didn't need to sacrifice any more of them, as the second CR70's shield collapsed.

"Target its weapon emplacement!" I called out. "Broadcast open comms! I want them to hear me!"

The clone at comms worked for a moment before giving me the thumbs up.

"Slavers! You have ten seconds to land and surrender!" I demanded. "Land your ship and power down weapons, or we will knock you out of the sky!"

Whether it was anger, loyalty, stupidity, or a combination of all three, the now unprotected ship refused to comply, its weapons targeting the *Loyal Hound*, who was reporting shields dropping down even further.

"Fine, they asked for it. *Intervention*. Target their engines and bring them to the ground!"

The weapons of both the *Loyal Hound* and the *Talos Chariot* fell silent, the *Intervention* coming around and barraging the similarly sized ship, hammering its large array of thruster. First, one thruster exploded and went dark, followed by a second, third, and final three of them exploded together, and the ship began to fall.

For a moment, I was worried it would try and plow into itself into another ship, but either they didn't think of it, or their engines were too damaged to maneuver. Instead, the ship fell from the sky, trying desperately to stay flying, only to slam into the ice several hundred meters away from the other two slaver ships. Snow, ice, and fire shot up at the impact site, and the ship went dark.

"Broadcast again!" I called out, waiting for the signal before continuing. "Slaver ships, this is your final chance! Land and power down all weapons! This is your final chance before we are forced to eliminate all threats permanently!"

It took a handful of seconds before all weapons fire stopped, and the two remaining ships slowly sank back down to the ground.

"We have a message, Sir!" The comms officer stated. "They have surrendered and are powering down their systems!"

"Call back the raindrops and send out the V-wings and the *Brick* to confirm that the second CR70 is down. I want a scan of the damage," I ordered. "*Talos Chariot*, back up our starfighters. If the starship opens fire on them, flatten it. Have the BX units begin clearing the wreckage. Anyone who shoots at them is dead, but I want them to stun the rest of them."

The *Brick* was currently loaded up with twenty BX units, led by Boxi, previously known as BX-01. They would be able to clear the wreckage quickly, and considering the assholes on board the second CR70 had refused to surrender, I was fine letting the commando droids clear it out completely.

"*Loyal Hound*, orient yourself behind the shuttle and first CR70. Keep your weapons charged and targeted on their engines," I ordered. "*Intervention*, once their ship is fully de-powered, I want you up high and running a fully powered scan once you're out of the atmosphere. I want to know if any more surprises are coming to say hello."

For about ten minutes, I stayed on the bridge, waiting for word from our teams. Eventually, Boxi confirmed that the disabled CR70 was grounded and defunct and that its crew was either stunner or dead. Not long after that, the *Intervention* confirmed we had no incoming threats that it could see. With that information in mind, I formed a pair of strike teams to board the two surrendered ships. My team boarded the surrendered CR70, apprehending the crew and going room by room to clear it of any hiding personnel. At that point, the crew seemed to understand that they were screwed, and we experienced very little resistance, especially when the first person to pull a blaster on watched in horror as the red bolt of energy he fired simply glanced off my armor.

The interior of the ship was in surprisingly good condition for the ship's age and who was using it, but it was also clear to see that the ship would need quite a bit of maintenance to get it up to our standards. I interrogated several different members of the crew to confirm there weren't any booby traps, only to discover that there were actually several of them. Thankfully, once I knew about them, I was able to force the crew to disable them safely. None of them were willing to play the hero and take one for the team, so the traps were quickly disabled, and we could get back to clearing the ship.

While my team was clearing the cruiser, Tatnia's team was clearing the transport. The interior was nearly completely converted into a mass slave transport ship, a horrific concept. It was made only worse by the fact that it wasn't empty. Almost seventy-five people were on board the transport ship against their will.

Once I was informed, I immediately called the *Rebellion*. While we were capable of a lot, this sort of thing was far above what my group was capable of handling. We could technically transport that many people around, but the conditions wouldn't be much better than they were, stuffed inside the CSS's modified rooms.

Thankfully, the *Rebellion* was happy to help, with three much more reasonable transport ships showing up within two days, with enough room and supplies to take care of all victims. We kept everyone fed and gave them more freedom to walk around the ship until, eventually, the *Rebellion* arrived with transportation and more supplies. They would probably make the offer of joining the *Rebellion*, but I trusted Hera, whom I was in contact with, to make sure they were appropriately treated.

The process of taking care of the kidnapped and abducted people took a few days, during which the Rebellion also made an offer for the Braha'tok gunship, the CSS transport, and the pirate freighter. They offered five hundred thousand credits for the gunship, which was a little low, even if the ship was damaged, so I used that to my advantage. With a bit of negotiation, I managed to convince them to keep the starship stationed at Omega Station. It wouldn't always be there, but when it was between missions and patrols, it would function as another layer of protection for our station. Plus, I was thrilled not to have to purchase parts and work on repairing it, especially since we had enough work ahead of us on getting our new CR70 and the *Whale Shark* up to scratch.

I only got seventy thousand for the Star Shuttle since it was unarmed and would need a complete internal overhaul. At that low of a price, I was tempted to keep it until I had a use for it, but Tatnia convinced me it wasn't worth the work, and we were pretty far away from ever needing that much pure transportation capabilities at once. I got eighty thousand for the freighter since it had already been modified with extra weapons and better shields. Tatnia convinced me to let that one go because we already had too many projects and staffing needs already. If we needed something, we could buy it anyway.

The Rebellion was also eager to buy the broken remains of the second CR70. Apparently, the CR70 and the CR90 shared a whole list of parts, which was not surprising considering that CIS was the company that designed them both. Since there were quite a few CR90s in the Rebel fleet, they were desperate for every little part they could get. They offered me a hundred thousand for the wreck, and when I happily took the deal, the wreck was gone within three days.

Finally, when our backroom deals were done, we called the bounty officer. It took them a few days to arrive, and they did so with their own prison transport. On top of what we had already calculated with the pirates, quite a few of the slavers also had bounties on them, both government and private. It wasn't much, just another fifty thousand, but I was happy to do away with them, knowing they would be going to some sort of jail or punishment.

Once the bounties were collected, and the officer spent some time trying to convince us to leave the *Whale Shark* behind, he left, and we would soon follow. The last thing we did was spend some time salvaging the wrecked raindrops for anything worth using. We lost four in total, cutting the *Talos Chariots* fighter complement in half. I would either have to barter for more from General Syndulla or start looking for an alternative, one that wasn't so scarce. While I was sure there were more tri-fighters out there, relying on salvage was going to mean spending time without them as we looked for more.

Then again, it was hard to beat the free price tag of salvage.

Finally, with our tasks complete and a bounty officer set to return soon, we once again broke up and distributed the crews, shifting around the naval droids. In the end, we were just only able to staff all of the important jobs. Of course, the only reason that was even possible

with the addition of the CR70 was because the Rebellion loaned us three dozen crew to help us get home. Even then, the trip was a bit stressful.

When we finally arrived home, we got the first look at the station's new security system, which we had discussed briefly with General Syndulla and General Dodanna. It was simple, and started with an armored comms beacon set out in deep space. We dropped out of hyperspace around the beacon and used it to communicate with the station. After passing a scan and answering some questions, we were given the station's new location, which was pretty far away, considering just how little thrust power it had.

After making the final jump, we began the process of landing our ships inside the station. Thankfully, the Rebellion had made major strides in getting the entire station up and running, meaning there was plenty of hangar space. Emphasis on 'was,' since after parking the two large ships, we were more or less out of large-scale hangars. Thankfully, there were plenty of smaller hangars dotted around each side of the core station.

Once we finally landed, we were met by Miru and a large group of the Skyforged, who had come to see the most recent additions to our fleet.

"Woah... that's a lot of hardware!" Miru said, looking up under the giant carrier. "Boss, we are going to need more repair crew, more workers, and more repair bots if you plan on fixing these both up and keeping them running."

"I know, Miru," I said with a wince. "If you come up with a list of what you need, I'll do my best to get it for you, and our next mission is going to be a recruitment drive. Tatnia and I talked about it, and I want a higher biological versus robotic ratio for our crews."

"Does that include streamlining things so the ship computer can handle more of those crew tasks on its own?" Miru asked, looking over her shoulder from where she was inspecting one of the *Whale Shark's* landing struts. "Both of these ships are older, the CR70 especially. I'm willing to bet I can streamline both of them quite a bit, really reduce the crew needed for each."

"Could you do that on any other of our ships?" I asked, wondering why this had never come up before.

"No, they are already pretty streamlined," She explained, shaking her head. "The *Intervention* and *Loyal Hound* are already pretty efficient, and the *Chariot* is small enough that its crew is naturally small."

"Right. Well, spend as much time as you need figuring that out. Any position you can shave off is another job we don't need to fill, which means one less mouth to feed and bank account to pay out."

"Sure thing, Boss!"

I hung around the hangar for a while, talking to Miru and discussing some of the options for the crew, as well as what we would need in terms of supplies for working on the ship. After a while, I escaped, feeling the wear and tear of being on a mission for so long starting to weigh on me. It wasn't that we had been constantly busy. Quite a bit of the last week or two had been waiting around for things to happen, after all. Instead, it was that I was always in charge, worrying about multiple things, stressed out about oncoming conflicts, and everything else that went along with leadership. The entire operation had taken its toll, and I was exhausted.

As I made my way to my room, passing by several members of the team as they settled in as well, I couldn't help but smile and remember how nervous I had been about first leading the team, back when it was just Tatnia, Nal, Miru, and myself. Now, I was in charge of around forty people, and we were hunting down slavers and pirates.

I grabbed a snack before closing myself off in my room to rest. We had a lot of work to do, but that could wait a day or so for everyone to recover.