

After the door to Julius's new room shut, sealing him inside so he could rest after his rather eventful night, I barely made it ten steps before Tatnia stopped me.

"I assume you invited him...."

"To keep an eye on him?" I finished quietly, Tatnia nodding in confirmation. "It's not the only reason, but yeah."

"What's the other reason?"

"We need more crew anyway, and he seemed to know what he was doing," I said with a shrug.

"He didn't do anything, he got hit before he did anything," She pointed out.

"Through no fault of his own," I countered. "He stayed cool, calm, and collected. He didn't even panic when he thought he was dying. I want him close by, but he also isn't a bad choice from what he told us about his job."

"Assuming he was telling the truth."

"That's... a fair point. We can ask Racer to see if he can get us access to his work records, and maybe we can run him through some drills at some point," I suggested.

We made our way to the lounge area, where the rest of the crew was already waiting. I made a quick announcement that Julius was joining us. Nal didn't seem surprised, and Miru and Calima simply nodded. We spent a few more hours on alert, basically just sitting around, ready to react if Racer called from the cockpit that the cops were on their way. When nothing happened, most of the crew headed to sleep. I wasn't far behind them, only asking Racer to confirm Julius's story and work history before turning in.

The next morning I woke up late, unsurprising considering how late everyone was up the night before. I quickly read Racer's information on Julius, which was basically a few police and internal reports confirming his presence at a few attempted robberies and raids. After reading through some of those, I cleaned up in the sonic shower and headed out into the ship, making my way to the lounge. Tatnia and Calima were having breakfast, chatting about her stay on the planet.

"It didn't seem that bad," Tatnia said, giving me a nod as I entered.

"Oh, there are... Certainly worse trade worlds," Calima admitted with a shrug. "But Terr'skiar has a lot of issues under the surface. The ruling trade groups are cutthroat and greedy. There is even a Hutt in control of one, though she is apparently an exile."

I grabbed a small breakfast bar from the kitchen system, waving as I left the lounge and headed down to the first deck, heading down into the forward cargo bay. The large forward space was abuzz with activity, with Miru, Julius, Nal, and three of our five LE repair droids. I noticed one of the droids was painted red rather than the blue and white combination that the others shared.

The cargo bay had clearly been re-organized, most likely to make room for the group's current project, the speeder bikes we acquired. As I looked around, I noticed there were quite a few less battle droids, and those that remained were neatly stored in the custom charging bays Miru had made. I could see five B2s, with the remaining free spaces filled with B1s.

As I watched, I could see the three LE droids steadily taking apart one of the C-PH speeders, with another one already disassembled. The remaining three were being worked on by Mire, Nal and Julius.

"Morning, everyone," I said as I looked around. "So what's the verdict?"

Miru stood from the bike she was working on and grabbed a rag, cleaning some of the grease off of her hands.

"They were in rough shape, Boss," She admitted, shaking her head. "After looking through them all, Nal and I decided it was better to completely disassemble two of them and then use the parts that were still good to fix up the remaining three. Sorry for not letting you know, but-"

"Don't worry about it, Miru, if you say they weren't worth saving, I believe you," I assured her. "Engineering is your wheelhouse."

"Well, I think that these will be up and running by the end of today... probably," She said, adding the last bit after a pause. "The air speeder is pretty much the same, but we don't have replacement parts. I made a list, and we will need to buy a few parts before I would be comfortable flying it around. It's honestly a miracle it made it back to the ship."

"How much will they cost?"

"No more than three thousand," She explained. "Probably closer to two if I can find them for a good price."

"I'd like to get the air speeder up and running, especially since we really can't fly the bikes around casually, on this planet especially or any with a big Imperial presence," I said, continuing when Miru looked confused. "They are military tech, they will catch a lot of attention if we fly them around. The speeder is much less conspicuous, even if it's armed."

"Oh... should I stop and focus on that?"

"No, they all need to be finished," I assured her. "We can use a taxi in the meantime. Just get the parts before we leave."

"When will that be?" Nal asked, now wiping his own hands clean.

"I want to see if we can find one more person, someone capable of fighting before we leave. That said, four people is enough to complete some basic jobs," I responded. "So I'm compromising and spending another day searching, and if we don't find anyone, we are finding a bounty or a job posting somewhere and heading out."

"I will take her to a shop today," Nal confirmed, looking at Miru, who smiled.

"Great. I'm going to be heading out with Tatnia soon, let me know if something comes up when we are gone."

I turned to leave before stopping, spotting the red droid again from the corner of my eye.

"Why is one painted red?"

"Oh, he is the prime," Miru explained. "I'm going to keep him on and powered more frequently, doing checkups and looking for faults around the ship. Over time he will develop a personality."

"And that's a good thing?"

"Sometimes, depending on what develops," She explained before adding with a shrug. "If it's not, I'll wipe it and try again."

"Huh... alright!"

I made my way back to my room and quickly got ready, throwing on my armor and my jacket and putting my plaster pistol on my hip before heading out to find Tatnia. I went over my plan with her to spend another day looking for a new crewmate before leaving, successful or not.

Twenty minutes later, Tatnia and I were once again in a taxi on our way back to the same bar we had been to the day before. We got a similar reaction as we stepped inside, though there were a few more considering looks as we walked to the bar. Tatnia ordered a caf for each of us as we sat down at the bar, since neither of us was interested in alcohol this early in the morning.

Eventually, we asked the bartender if there was anyone looking for long-term work, specifically working for a mercenary team. He directed us to a few people sitting around the bar, but as we talked to them, I didn't think any of them were a good enough fit.

"You're being too picky, Boss," She said after we assured the fifth person that we would comm them if we changed our minds.

"I'm not inviting anyone on the ship that I wouldn't feel comfortable leaving Miru alone with," I said emphatically.

"I... guess that's a good point," Tatnia agreed, wincing slightly.

Not long after that, we were on our way home. We stepped through the entryway and into the forward cargo hold to find the remaining three speeder bikes, cleaned and freshly painted, arrayed side by side, tucked against the starboard wall. All four of the crew that had stayed behind, Julius, Miru, Nal, and Calima, were standing and sitting by the door. Julius had a blaster pistol in his hand but had turned to see us. Down on the other end of the ship was a target painted on a big sheet of metal.

"What are you guys doing?" I asked Nal. "I thought you would set up outside."

"This pistol has adjustable output settings," Miru explained. "We turned it all the way down, and it's like a training blaster. And I don't think the owner of the landing pad would like us shooting up his property."

I let out a long sigh before gesturing for them to continue.

"Alright, Julius, show us what you got," I said, watching as he nodded and turned back to the target.

We watched for a while, Julius proving that he was, in fact, a really good shot, better than Tatnia and I with a blaster pistol at least. We took turns for a while before we broke down the practice setup. A quick conversation with everyone, and we decided to leave tonight before the landing pad owner could charge us for another day.

It took just under an hour for us to call in our intention to leave, get a flight plan, pull away from Terr'skiar and jump to hyperspace. It was a short jump, just long enough to put us in the open and endless void of space. When our sensors read that everything was clear, I called a meeting. Everyone made their way to the lounge area, sitting down at the meeting table.

"With Calima and Julius on board, our new transportation acquired, and the *Talos Chariot*, we have completed my first goal." I explained, leaning forward in my chair, which was the head of the table. "Which means it's time to talk about secondary goals."

"You mean taking bounties, doing mercenary work?" Miru asked, looking confused. "Do you have other things in mind?"

"I do. I have several. Some of them are too far in the future to even think about, but for now, my next goal is pretty simple. Build a name, build up resources, build up our money."

"Why?" Nal asked. "Those are important, but you seem to be thinking of something specific."

"As impressive as what we have achieved so far is, I want to go further," I explained. "This ship, us, the equipment we have, our skills, it's impressive, but ultimately just a small footnote. We could leverage it if we are lucky and determined, but I want to be able to do more. I want to *do* more. Maybe we side with the Rebellion, maybe we try to take down slavery on a much bigger scale. Maybe we build a fleet and stamp out the Hutts. There are a lot of possibilities out there, and I want the strength and ability to do them when we want to."

My crew was looking at me as I talked. Miru, Nal, and Tatnia seemed to understand where I was coming from. They had all experienced slavery in some way, even if it was just a taste for Nal and Tatnia. The desire to *never* be in that situation again, to never be that vulnerable, to never be that powerless, it was strong enough for them to understand and want the same thing I did.

My reason was just a lot more simple. I had lived a good chunk of my life working for other people, usually working way too hard for way too little. I wanted to be free, wanted to be a powerful enough player that fucking *no one* could push me around. I wasn't looking to be the next emperor, and I wasn't a fan of the idea of leading a large group, but that didn't matter. If leading was the cost for respect and just the right amount of fear to keep assholes from doing stupid shit, then so be it. Even better, with that kind of clout, I could help people. Still, make money, yeah, but actually be able to help as well.

"Julus, Calima, I know that this is a lot to hear so soon after joining up, but it's not nearly as intense as it sounds. It just means that I'm looking to expand, and some of our jobs are going to be focused on that."

"You may not have... said it out loud, but I would have had to be deaf and blind to not be able to see your ambition," Calima assured me with a smirk. "As long as you... do not expect me to die for your ambition, and I get my cut, then I'm happy."

"Yeah. Same," Julus added. "You don't do subtle very well, Boss."

"I know," I responded with a smile. "that's what I have you guys for, right?"

"So, if the goal is to grow, with a capital [Grek](#), what's our first move?" Tatnia asked.

"Well, I would like to make some more money, finish building up a bit more," I answered. "I know Miru has some plans she wants to implement that will hopefully improve our fighting capabilities."

"I... have a few ideas," She admitted. "I... Well, I can go over them later, but my first goal is to get the two tri-fighters up and running and tied to our commands. Then maybe do something with the vulture droids?"

"Right. Well, stuff like that will take money, and I would also maybe consider getting a second ship, one to pilot alongside ours. Long term, however... I think working with the Rebellion is something we should consider."

"You seemed pretty against that before," Tatnia pointed out. "What changed?"

"I'm against joining completely. But working alongside them?" I explained. "The Empire is a blight, and eventually, it's going to fall. I have a good feeling that the Rebels have a solid chance of making that happen. It... well fuck it sounds manipulative and cold, but getting in on the ground floor now...."

"You're hoping to ride their wave of success?" Julius asked, making me wince.

"Pretty much. Don't get me wrong, I do believe in their cause, and I do want them to succeed. It just so happens that it's also a great opportunity," I explained. "Having a say in what comes next wouldn't be so bad either."

Depending on what canon was dominant, the New Republic that the Rebellion built was either going to be completely inept or partially inept and very unstable. Maybe I could influence that to change, but in order to do that, I would have to have influence first. And in order to do that, my group would have to be more than a few people in one cruiser.

"Well. I have nothing against that plan," Julius said. "I have no real love for the Empire, though I don't have any love for the Rebellion either."

"I... Would also be alright with this," Calima said with a small smile. "The Empire is, indeed, a blight... I would happily help wipe it out, especially if we can gain from it."

All it took to understand if Miru, Tatnia, and Nal were on board was a look.

"Alright. So, our current game plan is to take some jobs, save some money, spend some money, build up our capabilities, and see if we can't get back to the Rebellion and be useful," I said, getting nods in agreement. "Great. Now... how do mercenaries usually find work?"