

"Thank you, thank you," He said, sagging in relief. "I... No one has even offered that much, at this point, I was contemplating trying to do it myself..."

"My first question is, why haven't you gone to the police or the security forces?" I asked. "I assume they have something like that here?"

"We do, the Terr'skiar Planetary Security Force. And I did. They don't care about anything that doesn't affect the traders," He spat, shaking his head. "The Blood Cores are small time and keep to their neighborhood. Sure, they terrorize that neighborhood, but they don't go anywhere near the trade centers, warehouse districts, or high-end parts of the city. I reported Zandev's murder, and they promised to investigate, but nothing happened after a week. I went to ask what was wrong, and they told me there was nothing they could do."

He clenched his uninjured fist and his jaw, anger almost radiating off of him.

"Zandev's only crime was trying to stop me from getting beaten to death, and they killed him. And laughed! I..." He let out a long breath, shaking his head. "The idea that they are out there, enjoying their lives after what they did to him... I can't live with that."

"I don't blame you," I said with a solemn frown. "What else can you tell us about them? We need to know what we might be getting into."

Over the next fifteen minutes, Julius explained everything he had learned about the small-time gang, including their home base and some of their more recent crimes. They lived out of an old abandoned garage, which was only empty because they ran off the previous owner. They treated the neighborhood that they lived in as their own little fiefdom, charging protection money and roughing up anyone who didn't pay up. According to the recovering young man, several people told him that when they first moved in, they made an example of the first few people who tried to stand up to them.

"But there were no reports?" I asked. "Nobody told the Security Force?"

"In an area like that, the TPSF is just another gang," Julius explained. "They come in, rough up people who are just trying to survive, arrest anyone who complains, and usually just make the situation worse by pissing people off. Most of them are dirty anyway."

I frowned, unable to make up my mind as the obviously still grieving man explained the situation. I wasn't getting any bad vibes from Julius, he felt sincere and seemed to be truly grieving for the loss of his friend. But I wasn't comfortable committing my team to be executioners without making sure that the people on the chopping block had it coming. I would need to get back to the *Chariot* and see what everyone thought.

"Okay. We need to take this back to the rest of the crew," I eventually said, Julius nodding eagerly. "Personally, from what you've said, this looks like a solid opportunity. And you want to participate?"

"Yes. I'm still sore in some places, but I'm not missing this."

"Do you have experience with this kind of thing?" Tatnia asked before I could.

"I am a security guard for a warehouse company, we walk patrols at night and sometimes accompany transports when they are carrying anything particularly valuable," He explained. "I'm a fair pilot with most speeders and a better shot than most with a blaster. My father taught me how to shoot when I was younger, and my job pays for extra training."

"And what about actual light-fights?" Tatnia asked. "Have you ever been in one of those?"

"A few, maybe five or six," He responded. "We had to fight off a couple robbery attempts, as well as a few warehouse raids."

"Alright, so it's unlikely that you'll freeze at least," She said. "Assuming you're telling the truth."

"We will head back to our ship and talk to the team," I said, slowly standing. "Give me your comm number so we can get in contact with you when we have reached a decision."

He quickly rattled off his number, and I fed it to my comm before giving the man a nod. We shook hands again before leaving the back corner of the room. As we did, Tatnia tugged me back to the bar itself. She put a credit ingot down on the counter, which got the bartender's attention.

"The man we were talking to, anything you can tell us?" She asked, watching the bartender pick up the ingot

"He's been in every day for a week, at least," He said, shaking his head. "Trying to put a hit on some gang. Isn't offering nearly enough, though."

"Thanks. Have a good afternoon," She responded before we both headed out of the cantina.

Fifteen minutes later and we were climbing up into the *Chariot*. As we stepped through the prep room and past the airlock, Miru came around to greet us from her workshop, Racer following right behind her.

"How did it go?" She asked, wiping her hands on a greasy rag before throwing it back into her space. "Nal said you found a pilot but hasn't said anything else."

"We might have stumbled into a job," I admitted, Miru's eyes widening slightly in surprise. "C'mon, we can explain it over food, I'm starving, and I've been drinking on an empty stomach."

It only takes a few minutes for the whole team to meet up in the lounge area. I was standing behind the countertop while Nal, Tatnia, and Miru sat on the stools, everyone eating from their food packets.

"So, Julus overheard us talking about speeders and essentially used that to offset the fact that he couldn't really afford what it would really cost to wipe out the gang," I explained. "My first instinct was to believe him, but we need to be sure before we do anything drastic. Racer?"

The droid's angular head spins as we wheel out from behind the counter, focusing on me with a string of beeps.

"Do you think you could skim the top of the local security force branch and see what they have on them?" I asked. "Don't slice any deeper than you have to, and don't do anything that would lead back to us."

The little astromech whistled in confirmation, spinning around and heading straight to the cockpit to connect to the comm unit there, as it would have a better connection.

"The pay is crap, but the salvage would save us a lot of money and solve one of our biggest problems," Tatnia admitted.

"More than that," Nal said, shaking his head. "C-PH is top of the line. Each is worth five thousand credits, in decent shape."

"Seriously?" I asked with wide eyes. "How the hell did they get their hands on that?"

"They stole it." Miru said, reading from her datapad. "Racer just sent this, it looks like they stole them from a bigger gang, one with much more resources. That's why the TPSF hasn't gone after them. They stole from a gang and then ratted them out to the Security Force. As long as they keep screwing over other gangs, they are willing to look the other way."

"Even with the crimes that have been reported?"

"Yup," Miru responded. "They don't really care. The bastards probably just assume that they will get themselves wiped out eventually, so there's no reason to spend resources, especially not while they can whittle down the bigger gangs in the meantime."

"What other crimes are they guilty of?" I asked, prompting Miru to scroll through her information.

"They know about two more murders, drug trafficking, assaults... a few sexual assaults."

"... Now I'm tempted to hit the TPSF as well, just to fuck with them," I said, shaking my head. "What kind of assholes let people like that walk around when they are supposed to... Fucking hell. Okay, Unless anyone has a problem, I'm going to call Julius and tell him we will take the job, have him come here so we can plan it out."

When no one spoke up, and Nal and Tatnia nodded in agreement, I stood and walked a bit away from the table, pulling out my comms unit. A quick scroll through my contacts later, and the call was sent, connecting almost immediately.

"Julus? Yeah, it's Deacon. My team has agreed to take your offer," I said, smiling as the younger human shouted in happiness. "I'm going to send you the info for where our docking bay is. Catch a ride here so we can start the planning process."

"Alright, great! Yes, I'll head right over." He responded, his smile audible. "I'll be there in ten."

I said a quick goodbye before hanging up, sliding my comm back into my pocket. Before I could turn back to the group, though, my comms dinged loudly, a call coming in. I quickly took the device back out and activated it.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Deacon, this is Calima... I have just arrived at your docking bay. Your ship is interesting, I don't think I have ever seen a C-ROC quite like this."

"It's an original modification," I admitted. "Our own engineer designed it. Hold on a second. I'll be down to let you in."

I made my way down to the boarding ramp, tapping the button to deploy it down. When it made contact with the landing pad, Calima came into view. She was wearing a single backpack and was carrying a second bag. As she reached the top of the stairs, I took the second bag for her, hefting it relatively easily.

"Thanks... So this is already different from the last time I was on a C-ROC," She admitted, looking around the airlock-style ready room.

"I wouldn't know, but like I said, it was heavily modified as a hauler for the Separatists," I explained, leading her out of the room and into the cargo bay.

"Definitely modified...this cargo bay is much more open," She said.

"So I have been told," I said as we stepped into the cargo bay, stopping and gesturing to Miru's space. "This is Miru's workshop, she is the team's engineer and builder. She is a bit young, so when we leave to go on missions, she will likely be here with you. The other side had charging stations for droids."

"And those are your spoils from the 'salvage' mission," She said, pointing to the stacked and folded-up droids against one side of the cargo bay.

I nodded and continued the short tour, showing her the large door to the hangars before leading her upstairs.

"You can claim any of these rooms, they have [double beds](#), but we don't plan on having enough people to fill them yet, so feel free to use it as storage for now," I explained, watching her pick one of the rooms, the door opening smoothly.

"Huh... not bad. Definitely been stuck in worse," She said as she walked in, looked around, and nodded. "Not having to share will make it much easier for now."

She tossed her bag into her bed, taking the one I was carrying and putting it down beside it. She took off her jacket and hung it up before turning to smile at me, her tendrils moving as she did.

"I'd like to see the cockpit...."

I nodded and led her down the hall to the lounge, where everyone was still waiting. She spotted everyone and gave a short bow.

"Miru, Nal, this is Calima. She is our new primary pilot," I said, smiling as Miru stood up from her chair and held out her hand, which the Tholothian shook.

"It's nice to meet you, are you gathered to meet me?" She asked, turning to look at me.

"I would have done that, but we were already gathered for lunch and to discuss and offer. Are you hungry?"

"No... thank you, I ate before leaving my previous apartment. But thank you," She said. "May I ask what kind of offer?"

"Yeah, of course. Why don't I take you to the bridge and explain? These guys have already heard and agreed to the offer."

"Very well..."

I led her to the bridge, and the Tholothian immediately claimed the pilot's chair, examining the various screens, buttons, levers, and knobs in front of her, humming in what I was pretty sure was approval. After a minute or so of this, I started going over the offer. When I got to the part about how the TPSF was letting this all happen, Calima did not seem surprised.

"The TPSF is... almost completely owned by the major shipping companies that use Terr'skiar as a stopping point. They get involved, keep the peace, and patrol more affluent areas, but they have all but given up... on the outskirts," She explained. "It does not surprise me that they are doing nothing about this gang."

We talked a bit more about the ship, its modifications, and its automation, which she was a big fan of. After about five minutes, she leaned back and nodded confidently.

"I can easily pilot this ship, it is a simplified modification to the standard Corellian Engineering control scheme," She assured me, turning back in her chair. "I could likely fly this ship unaided... save for combat situations."

"That's good to hear, there will probably be someone up here with you just in case, but it's good to know you can manage."

When we left the bridge, opening the reinforced bridge access door, I found most of my team talking to Julius. He looked mostly the same, though the bandage on his hand was gone. He was still clearly nursing an injury there, but it seemed he was putting that aside for the moment and dealing with the resulting pain. He also looked invigorated, the news that we were taking his offer clearly having given him new energy.

"Julus, glad you're here," I said, gesturing to Calima. "This is our new pilot, just joined with us today."

The two shared a simple nod, and I clapped my hands before gesturing to the large table that took up the corner of the lounge area, with enough seats for all of us. It was opposite the kitchen system, the counter, and stools, and was another piece of furniture we claimed from the Separatist base.

"Right, well now that you're here, we can talk about business and how this operation you brought to us is going to go. Have a seat, and let's get started."