

“Wait, that?” Miru asked, turning to look at me with a surprised look. “Leaving? Already? We... we’ve barely done anything! What about freeing more slaves, robbing the bastards who... who did this to us?”

“Miru, kiddo... We can’t do anything to help if we are dead,” I said, letting out a deep breath. “This is going to bring way too much heat. Even if they hadn’t gotten a good look at the A5 and MRV, we would be going to ground hard. I’m talking about months of waiting before we even started planning the next move. But now? This much money changed this from attacks of opportunity to criminals targetting a legal business that the Hutts and their peers make a lot of money from. There are going to be bounties, wanted signs, and news reports. If the Enforcers are even mildly capable, they will be on the lookout for people using the credit chips in some of the boxes. You knew we wouldn’t be able to do this forever, and you agreed that becoming martyrs wasn’t an option.”

I reached out and put my arm around the young Twi’lek. She flinched for a moment, but before I could pull back, she leaned against my shoulder.

“I know, I know... I just figured we would be able to do a little more,” She admitted with a disappointed look, once again reminding me of my younger cousins. “It’s alright. I’m just being stupid.”

“No, you’re not,” I said, shaking my head. “I desperately wish I could do more too. But... We don’t have the resources to do much more than we’ve already done. I would have liked to spend a few more weeks, maybe even a month or so, liberating slaves and helping where we could. But this... We just put a very large target on our back. People are going to notice a pattern.”

“We were lucky our first job, where we freed you,” Nal explained, Miru looking up at the blue-skinned man. “We were able to take the ship with us and sell it without consequences. There will be consequences for this.”

“So, we are leaving,” Tatnia said, eager as ever to move the conversation along. “Who are we stealing a ship from?”

“Just pick one,” Nevue said with a scoff. “We could literally pick a direction and fly for five minutes, and we would go over five of them.”

“I’m... We should put it to a vote,” I said after a false start. “I’m willing to do that if we agree as a group, even if I would rather not.”

“Why not?” Nevue asked, looking annoyed. “You are so eager to steal from slavers, but there are other criminals here. This whole moon is rotted to the core. Even if you pick randomly, you’re still likely to pick someone who deserves it.”

“We have an alternative,” Nal pointed out. “Our first heist, they would have restarted business.”

“Is that a good idea?” I asked. “Returning to the scene of a crime strikes me as a bad idea.”

“But according to the Enforcers, there was no crime there,” Tatnia pointed out. “They would have kept that under wraps as much as possible, to cover up their tax evasion. No way that they reported it.”

“They would have increased security,” I countered. “I’m not against the idea, just wanted to point it out.”

“Unless they set up heavy turret emplacements, our vehicles can likely counter any upgrades.” Miru pointed out. “I’m more worried about the quality of the ship. The last one was a pile of junk that shouldn’t have left the ground, never mind traveled through space.”

“So... We return to that area, find someplace to hide out, and watch the location, waiting for someone to land. Once someone does, we assess their ship and decide if we want it... If we don't get one after a day, we go with Nevue's idea. Does that work for everyone?”

The group nodded, though Nevue still was clearly not happy about it. He didn't say anything, though, and we all agreed.

“Good... Miru, how bad was the damage to the truck?”

“It could have been a lot worse. The extra armor held up pretty well, but there was some damage,” She responded. “I'll have to take a closer look, but considering the fact that it didn't fall from the sky, nothing important was damaged.”

“Great. Also, I'm sorry, but I need you to paint the speeders again,” I explained. “We need to do everything we can to throw off the Enforcers and whoever else is undoubtedly looking for us, even if it means redoing good work.”

“It's fine. I'll just strip the accents and come up with something else,” She accepted readily.

“Tatnia, Nal, wanna help?”

“Sure. Anything to keep busy.”

We spent the next few hours into the night staying under the cover of the half-constructed building. While Nal, Tatnia, and Miru repaired and repainted the A5, Nevue and myself kept watch, our eyes on the city, hidden in the shadows of the empty permacrete structure around us. The two of us switched out frequently to keep from getting complacent and sloppy, but it was still incredibly boring. I spent my time rotating through my spells, at least the ones that I could cast inconspicuously and silently.

We finished the tense action-filled, and nerve-wracking day with a simple prepackaged dinner, all of us sleeping in the A5. One of us was on watch, of course, which meant everyone had a bed, and the person on lookout duty would switch with whoever was next.

The following day was more of the same. Miru, Nal, and Tatnia had finished fixing what they could, with Miru eventually announcing she was satisfied that nothing major was damaged, though we would be without temperature control and air purging until we got to a real shop. Tatnia had also stripped the accent paint on the A5 by the time it was dark the night before, which meant she and Miru would spend the afternoon painting and then roughing up new accents. The rest of us kept watch, killing time while we gave everyone a chance to calm down.

“Our biggest issue will be around this area,” Nal pointed out during lunch. “We are still relatively close to the crime scene. They will be looking for us hardest around here.”

“Rushing out is the exact last thing we should do,” Tatnia pointed out, Nal nodding in agreement. “We need to go slow. We can leave when it gets dark and find a place to hide near our target. We can watch the landing pad from far away since we will be attacking with the speeders.”

“About them... We are going to have to leave the A5 behind,” Miru pointed out. “It's too big to fit on any freighter that might be landing here.”

“Yeah, I thought about that. I wish we had gotten a bit more use out of it, but it already paid for itself after we sold the two transport speeders to that chop shop,” I admitted. “If we weren't on the edge of everything spiraling out of control, we could find someone to buy it, even for scrap. It's a shame, we didn't even really get to name it or break it in.”

“...Name it?” Tatnia asked, looking at me like I was slow. “You wanted to name it?”

“Not yet!” I responded defensively. “...But eventually, yeah. You gotta name stuff that you use for a while. It gives them more meaning, more metaphysical weight.”

“What does that even mean?”

“If you name something that has been with you for a while and has been reliable, it's got more metaphysical weight,” I explained. “The universe pays attention to stuff like that.”

“That... fucking hell, are you the kind of person to name your blaster?” She asked, shaking her head.

“Not if it's just a random gun I picked up,” I responded, mostly continuing because I could see that Miru was starting to smile out of the corner of my eye. “But if I have it for a while, and I've repaired it, upgraded it, cleaned it, and if I've done some stuff with it, then yeah. C'mon Miru, back me up.”

“...If you ever call out the name of your blaster during a fight, I’m leaving,” She said, trying to hide her smile “I don’t need you embarrassing me.”

“Traitor!”

The young mechanic giggled, and I winked at Tatnia, who smiled and nodded in return. The rest of the day was spent preparing and planning, the tight edge of tension that had gripped us overnight having lessened slightly.

When darkness finally reached us, we quickly packed everything together. The vehicles were now as nondescript as possible, both of them a dark gray color, worn and artificially dirtied. Miru was once again piloting while Tatnia sat on the copilot’s seat.

“Alright Nal, ready when you are,” I said when everyone was settled. “Lead us away.”

The Duros acknowledged and lifted off, flying ahead. He quickly lifted up over the temporary walls set up around the construction site, before continuing on over the buildings. Miru promptly followed in the A5, both of them keeping a reasonable speed. The only suspicious thing we were doing was flying a little low, but even that wasn’t too out of the ordinary.

The first ten minutes were tense, with Tatnia all but glued to the sensor screen, watching the movement of every other speeder in range. At one point, a pair of speeders got close, almost following beside us for a moment. We all breathed a sigh of relief when they kept going when Nal led us away, the two speeders heading off to their own business.

Two hours later and we were reaching the general area of our destination, though you could only tell because of the coordinates the city looked the same from our perspective. A quick check of clairvoyance was enough to settle any nervousness about traveling to the wrong location. When we finally landed in a tucked away parking space, paying the fee with a smile, it was late enough in the night that it was threatening to become a very early morning.

With nothing else to do, we decided to sleep, Nevue taking the first watch, followed by myself and then Tatnia. When I awoke the next morning, it was Tatnia shaking me awake.

“Get up lazy. We need to start watching the hangar.”

I quickly got ready, grabbing something to eat and strapping on my blaster pistol before following her. A quick walk and a longer climb up a set of external stairs led us to a shadow-covered rooftop, which overlooked an impressive expanse of the city district. Tatnia, who had found this spot earlier, handed me the electrobinoculars.

I peered through the advanced binoculars, the sophisticated software auto-adjusting for the perfect look. I could see the hangar perfectly, clear as day. Overall, very little had changed to the

structure, dispelling my fears of large turrets suddenly appearing. I did notice that more guards were walking around, two of them stationed on either side of the gate that led into the “reserved” hanger. To the right of that hangar gate was a gun emplacement of some kind.

“Damn... I wonder if they have any more of those inside,” I wondered out loud. “You think that could punch through the A5’s armor?”

“If it hits somewhere unarmored? Maybe,” She responded. “I’m more worried about what they have inside.”

“Have you seen any sign of what’s inside?”

“I’ve seen a few guards come in and out, carrying some impressive weapons,” She said. “My guess is that there are six inside and two outside, rotating occasionally. And don’t forget any ship that lands will bring more....”

“Yeah, not forgetting that.”

We watched the hangar for a while longer, silently passing the electrobinocular back and forth. We mainly stayed quiet, only talking when we spotted something new. Eventually, after a few hours, the guards started to perk up and move around.

“How much do you want to bet all this activity means something is incoming?” I asked Tatnia, only getting a scoffing chuckle in return.

Sure enough, ten minutes later, two transports arrive at the hangar, waiting at the entrance of the berth.

“Nal, start getting everything warmed up,” I said into my comm unit. “Looks like this might happen sooner than we thought.”

We were prepared to spend a day or more waiting, but it seemed like the schedule of these slavers had different plans. About twenty minutes later, a large ship landed in the hangar, and Tatnia and I started running back to the others. It was a smaller sized ship, but it also seemed to be in decent condition, much better than the last ship we had stole. It was a more compact design, with a curved top that jutted out past its underside.

We arrived back at the speeders only a minute or so later, both of us hopping into the back of the A5. Tatnia quickly sat in the co-pilot’s seat while I sat down on the back bench. Nevue was already holding the proton rifle while I reached over and grabbed one of the blaster rifles. Nevue saw that and smirked.

“Not going to use your fancy sparks and flames?” He asked, double checking the proton rifle was appropriately loaded.

"I can always drop the rifle," I responded with a shrug. "My damage stuff isn't quite so good for long range, at least not yet."

He shrugged, and before he could comment, I could feel the speeder slowing down.

"Get ready!" Tatnia shouted, the sound of the turret spinning and stopping filling the cargo space.

"Miru, park it above the ship. Keep them from taking off!" I shouted, standing and making my way to the door.

I cracked it open slightly before throwing it open completely, the A5's turret opening fire to cover me. Nevue kneeled next to me, and together we opened up on the guards that were already aiming up at us.

Red laser fire, both from my blaster and from the A5's turret, lanced downward. Tatnia was focused on the two stationary blaster cannons set up inside the hangar, while I started trying to pick off the still-struggling guards. Between the element of surprise, the high ground advantage, and our superior firepower, which was only increased when Nal started to make swooping strafing runs, we quickly took down the guards spread out around the hangar.

With the heavy weapons down, the next step was taking over the ship before it could take off. I looked down at the top of the ship below us, judging the distance before nodding, turning to Nevue, and putting my blaster rifle down on a bench.

"Cover me!" I called out to the Zabrak, before casting oak flesh on myself and jumping from the speeder.

I landed and rolled on the top of the freight ship, quickly regaining my footing and running toward the front end of the ship. Finding a good place to slide off, just behind a rather large sensor dish, I lowered myself down and let myself go. I slide down about six feet, using my hand free hand to slow myself down with the gaps in the ship hull plating. I landed roughly but rolled, working off the limp as I ran around to the front of the ship. I spotted Nal landing the speed bike not too far away, giving me covering fire as the people in the transport speeders started climbing out and shooting at me.

I pulled out my blaster pistol and cast lesser ward, returning fire as well as I came around to the entrance into the cargo bay of the relatively small freighter. With a curse, I was forced to dive and roll as the thick-plated door to the ship's cargo bay started to close. The door shut behind me as I recast the lesser ward, climbing to my feet and holding it in front of me just in time to block a spray of blaster pistol fire. I returned fire, missing twice but catching the crew member in the shoulder on the second.

As I rushed across the small cargo bay, passing several large crates, the thought that this definitely wasn't a slave delivery bounced around in the back of my skull. Still, I pushed forward, holstering my pistol and stopping by a ladder that led to what I assumed was the main deck of the ship. I had one foot and one hand on the rungs before I realized how dead I would be if I started climbing. Instead, I dual cast a fully charged familiar spell up through the hole to the main deck, the transparent form of my tiger familiar casting light purple light back through the bay.

The shouts, screams, and laser fire of at least two people echoed down through the hole as my tiger followed my orders to take down any hostiles. After a few seconds, the spell failed, having taken too much damage, but I only cast it again. I repeated this two more times before the spell timed out instead of failing due to damage. I dual cast oak flesh on myself and pulled out my pistol, slowly climbing the ladder, my familiar still active.

The main deck wasn't anything special, reminding me of the interior of a relatively large RV. My familiar was standing by the ladder, waiting for its next set of instructions, while three corpses slowly cooled on the floor, the last one in the doorway to the cockpit. I double-checked that the rest of the ship was empty before pulling out my comm and making my way back down to the cargo bay.

"How's it going out there?" I asked, my hand hovering over the controls for the cargo bay door. "Is it safe to come out?"

"We are clear," Nal responded. "Hostiles cleared out. Miru just landed."

I slapped the button to the cargo bay, the thick door slowly opening to reveal Nal, holding his blaster at the ready. I give him a nod before stepping out of the cargo bay and making my way across the landing pad. I could see Miru and Tatnia climbing out of the A5, Nevue already looking around, having replaced the proton rifle with one of the blaster rifles.

"Alright, let's get the money loaded up. The quicker-"

I spotted a tiny bit of movement from the corner of my eye, turning to spot a single guard standing on the lip of the ship berth, his blaster rifle held up in a tight grip as he aimed down at Tatnia and Miru.

"Look out!" I shouted, running past Nal, dual cast lesser ward already forming between my hands.

Tatnia whipped her head around, trying to spot the threat, while Miru just froze, focusing on me. The guard opened fire, missing the first two shots, the third just barely deflecting away from Miru as I stood between her and the guard. I held the ward out in front of me, deflecting a half dozen shots while Tatnia dragged Miru back inside the A5. Tatnia had just barely succeeded when my ward collapsed under the onslaught of red energy.

Fortunately, that was enough time for Nevue and Nal to target and kill the guard, the very dead man falling forward off the lip of the roof, falling head first to the ground. Unfortunately, he also managed to get two shots through. The first slammed into my stomach, the second hitting a little higher up.

I could smell burning as I stumbled backward from the impact. As I stumbled back, my feet caught the edge of something, causing me to trip and fall back completely. I could hear shouting, but all was silenced when I felt my head hit something on the way down, turning my brain off like a light switch.