

I woke up the following day sprawled out on one of the collapsible beds Nal had bought for us the day before. At some point, we had landed next to an abandoned, run-down building in one of the more deserted and empty parts of the city sector we had traveled to. Tatnia and Nal had set up the beds, including the two pull-down bunks that came installed in the A-A5 cargo space, and I had put Miru, still asleep, onto one of them. Not long after that, the rest of us also headed to sleep, tired from a long day of activity.

As quietly as possible, I sat up on the cot's edge, looking over everyone else as they still slept. The beds were surprisingly comfortable given how utilitarian in design they seemed to be, though I supposed I shouldn't be surprised. Nal and Tatnia had claimed the fold-out bunks and were still fast asleep while Miru was sleeping on the other collapsible bed.

I watched the sleeping Twi'lek for a long moment, her face showing none of the pain she had sobbed through the night before. Holding Miru as she cried had been a bit of a wake-up call for me, really hammering home that this was very real. This Star Wars universe was now my home, and I needed to stop treating it like it was a setting from some movies and books. I needed to take this seriously because while I wasn't here to shift the universe on its head, I had somehow become at least semi-responsible for the sleeping people in front of me. They clearly listened to what I said, and while I didn't think they would follow my orders without question, that still meant I needed to take this seriously.

And step one of that process was figuring out when the hell I was in the timeline.

Still trying to stay quiet, I stood up from the cot and walked to the cockpit, sealing the door behind me. The sun shining through the windshield told me that it was early morning, the skies already busy with air speeders and transports. I sat in the co-pilot's chair and pulled out one of the cleared datapads, tabbing through its holonet connection.

While I hadn't been actively avoiding finding out when precisely these entities had placed me, I had been putting off finding out for sure by sitting down and looking it up. There was a certain level of freedom that came from not being able to connect all of my meta-knowledge to anything that was currently happening in the galaxy. I flicked through the holonet, focused on figuring out when I was on the timeline I knew.

Immediately I hit a snag. The books had always sat on a timeline that used the Battle of Yavin as its zero date. Unfortunately, as far as I could remember, that was completely arbitrary and had nothing to do with the in-universe date. My entity-given knowledge knew it was currently 7977.435.4 CRC, but I had no idea where that would fall on the timeline I could remember. This CRC calendar was never mentioned anywhere, or at least anywhere I could recall. In fact, I couldn't remember dates or times *ever being mentioned at all*. I was stuck trying to connect the knowledge I knew about the universe with the knowledge I had from the universe.

That is until I stumbled on an Imperial-sponsored news site reporting that the destruction of Alderaan had been to prevent the propagation of biological weapons created by the planet's rebellious government.

I quickly dived deeper, looking up the destruction of the peaceful planet, feeling sick as I read through dozens of conspiracy theories surrounding it. There were a surprising amount of reports saying that the Empire was responsible and that Alderaan and its people had done nothing wrong, something I would have assumed the Empire would have suppressed.

Eventually, I found clips of the Death Star floating above the idyllic planet, the people panicking and recording it with their comms units, wondering what was happening. I also found footage of the same Death Star exploding, shot from space a far distance away. I didn't spend too long looking at it, just enough to confirm that it had happened a few months ago and that the rebellion was going strong.

I let out a long sigh, shaking my head and looking out of the windshield, watching the hundreds and hundreds of speeders flying through the air, people going about their day. All of them were real people, living their lives and doing their best to survive. I took another long breath and let it out.

I had no desire to dedicate my entire existence to the rebellion or throw my life away trying to solve this whole galaxy's problems. But if I had been dropped in before the destruction of Alderaan, with enough time to actually do something about it? What kind of person would I be if I put my own preference or safety ahead of the lives of an entire planet?

I felt guilty even acknowledging it, but with the planet's death in the past, I would be able to set my own schedule with a bit more flexibility. I would help where I could, maybe even donate some of my time if the opportunity provided itself, but I wasn't about to go out of my way to become Luke Skywalker's best buddy.

Someday I might step up, especially if we got involved with something I recognized, but for now, I needed to focus on myself and my own group.

I continued to ponder the future, my meta knowledge, and what exactly I planned on doing with it until my friends started to wake up. Nal was first, quickly followed by Miru and Tatnia. We shared a quick breakfast of shelf-stable, pre-packaged meals. They were self-heating with the addition of a bit of water, heating up to a decent-sized meal that actually tasted pretty good if you could get past the obvious artificial nature. Once everything was done, Nal set up the sonic shower, hooking it to the side of the speeder truck, and we each took our turn with it.

As I getting clean, I realized that the sonic shower explained why people like Han Solo had such a signature look. If you were looking to save money, buying one outfit and wearing it constantly was perfectly viable. All you had to do was step into the sonic shower while wearing

it, simultaneously cleaning yourself and your clothes nearly perfectly without reducing the clothes' lifespan like putting it on a washing machine and dryer would.

While Tatnia was getting clean, the rest of us set up a temporary shooting range inside the abandoned building we had spent the night next to. This area was run down, and we had parked in the back of a large abandoned building. With any luck, no one would call the Enforcers on us for trying out our new guns and getting a little practice in.

The first thing I wanted to try was our new blaster rifles and the new proton rifle. As we pulled the weapons out and carried them inside, I couldn't help but marvel at how normal the weapons felt. In many ways, they were completely indistinguishable from regular guns from back home.

Once we were settled, we started shooting down the longest hallway we could find in the building, aiming at random trash that we had gathered inside the building. Luckily the abandoned structure was almost entirely permacrete, so there was only a minimal fire risk.

After shooting the rifle a few times, Nal started giving me a few pointers, which actually helped quite a bit. Miru teased me for not knowing some of the tricks for shooting a blaster rifle, but after I blasted a double-handed sparks spell down the hall, zapping a trash can until it was glowing red in a few spots, she stopped. She smacked my shoulder when I teased her for pouting.

Firing the proton rifle was fun too. The recoil and flash of light it created was intense, but the fact that it drilled straight through a permacrete wall only served to drive home how much of a powerful weapon it was. Unfortunately, ammo for it was expensive and relatively rare, so we could each only shoot it two or three times for practice before packing the gun away.

After getting in some practice with our blaster pistols as well, it was time to finally test the lesser ward. I walked down the hall we were shooting down before stepping into a doorway. I held my hand out and cast the spell, the glowing protective shield lighting up the dim hallway and room. After taking a long breath, I called out that I was ready.

The first shot was a stun blast, which the ward blocked easily. However, I still felt the impact soaking into the shield, leaving my hand slightly tingly. After that, they tried a blaster pistol, starting slow and increasing the frequency over time. The ward held through the slowest test, a single shot every five seconds, but failed once they had increased to a single shot every three seconds. When they fired a blaster rifle at it, the shield died after absorbing a single shot.

This was extremely promising and made me very interested in unlocking some of the later ward versions. That said, the shield failing stung like a bastard, like I had just caught a fastball with my bare hands. I was *not* looking forward to how the more powerful wards felt when they failed. I was slightly worried it would be harsh enough to distract me from any other spells I was casting, a dangerous thing when fighting.

The last thing we tested, after packing everything back up, was the weapon systems on the A-A5 and the speeder bike, which Miru had identified as a trade federation combat speeder called an MVR-3. We saved these for last because we were all pretty sure they would attract a lot of attention.

The speeder truck's weapon, which was normally controlled by the co-pilot, blasted massive chunks through a permacrete wall with bright red energy. It was loud, and while it wasn't the most powerful vehicle-mounted weapon, it would absolutely annihilate any civilian vehicle that a slaver might be using.

The blaster cannons mounted to the MVR-3 were slightly less powerful but still carved deep holes in the same permacrete wall. It would probably punch through civilian vehicles but would definitely eviscerate anyone not inside a building or armored vehicle.

With the weapons tested, we quickly hopped into the cargo space of the A-A5, while Nal climbed onto the speeder bike, leaving the abandoned building behind.

We were flying for about an hour when Tatnia, who was co-piloting for Miru, finally broke the relative silence that had filled the speeder comfortably.

"Alright, so what's next?" She asked, looking over her shoulder to the cargo space. "We made some money and killed some slavers. Now we have more equipment than I have ever had access to before and more money than I've seen in a long time. So what's next?"

I looked up from my grimoire, pulling it back into myself when I realized this wasn't just a quick conversation. At the mention of the money, I looked over at the bench opposite mine, which was actually a storage container. We had emptied it, cleaned it out, and now it was where we kept the 19000 credits we had made.

"I mean, we rinse and repeat, right?" Miru asked, leaning forward to tap a few buttons on her console. "That's why we are traveling across the planet, right? So we can go again?"

"It is, but I think what Tatnia is trying to get at is that we don't really have a target, right?" I asked, the older woman nodding. "Well... that is something we will have to figure out."

"Really, Boss? Isn't that supposed to be your job?" Miru asked with a smirk. "The boss comes up with all the plans, right?"

"Brat," I responded before leaning back on the surprisingly comfortable bench. "I guess the problem is that we don't really have anything to work from. For the last job, we had our own

experience to pull from. But I doubt we will be able to open the phone book and look up slaver docking berths.”

“One, what's a phone book, two... I see your point,” Miru admitted.

We were quiet for a long pause as we tried to think of our options when Nals' slightly windswept voice suddenly filled the speeder.

“What about slave markets?”

All three of us shouted in shock at the unexpected inclusion of the Duros, who was currently flying the MVR-3 about thirty meters away. The speeder truck shook slightly as Miru jostled the controls, though she quickly corrected the mistake.

“Nal... What the fuck?” I asked, looking around the cargo space.

“I set up a two-way comm program through the A-A5's network and the speeder bikes pickup,” He explained. “I did not want to left out of planning. Or whoever might be piloting the MVR-3.”

“How did I not see that?” Miru asked rhetorically, leaning in closer to one of her console screens, tapping at it for a second before leaning back and shaking her head. “Not a bad setup. I'll refine it to something more permanent later.

“Can we get back on topic, please?” Tatnia asked. “Nal, we can't go after the markets. With how much money changes hands at one, there is no way they aren't heavily defended. It would be like assaulting a Hutt bank.”

“Correct. But the markets are the hubs for the slave trade,” He explained, pausing for a moment before continuing. “We can track speeders coming and going from the markets with some simple observation.”

“Not bad, Nal. Glad you were listening in,” I said, stroking my beard. “So, we hang out around a slave market, wait for a transport to leave, and follow it back wherever it's going. Then what? Stage a raid? We won't know what is happening around that area.”

“Which means we run the risk of getting caught off guard,” Tatnia added, and I nodded in agreement. “But if we hold back... well, there is no guarantee that any slaver ship we find will use the same berth repeatedly, and we would be letting a group of people become slaves. ”

“Too many variables,” Nal commented. “An immediate raid might be necessary.”

“You might be right... but let's start small, a proof of concept for tracking out from a market. We watch a market, follow a slave transport out... and snatch it.”

“Just steal the transport?” Miru asked. “That seems... small scale compared to what you guys just did.”

“It would be. Depending on the quality of the speeder... we could earn a few thousand credits. Maybe,” Tatnia answered. “But as a proof of concept, it would work. We would still be leaving the slaves to be taken away....”

“It may be cold-hearted Tatnia, but we cannot save everyone,” Nal said, his voice solemn and serious. “We cannot even save most. Focus on the good we can do.”

Tatnia let out a long breath, nodding after a long moment.

“So... Do we just look up nearby slave markets?” Miru asked. “Is that the kind of thing they put on the planetary holonet?”

Tatnia and I shared a look before I pulled out my datapad and started looking it up. Turns out, they did advertise the market on the holonet, in a way sickeningly similar to a used car lot, with snapshots and price listings. I scrolled through, looking for location information and other details, sharing them with Tatnia. She also looked ill, shaking her head as she read through a separate site.

After twenty minutes of research, we had our next target, a market an hour away from the area we were in. Tatnia found the site and pointed out the most important bit of information on the entire site.

“It says who owns it,” she explained. “I don’t recognize the name, but it’s not a Hutt, which is all that really matters.”

“Alright... well in that case, Miru, head to that location,” I said, pushing my grimoire back into my hands. “We can find someplace to park, and decide how we want to keep an eye on the market.”