

I sat down across from the Tholothian, placing the refill in the center of the table, while Tatnia sat down next to me.

"Hello, my name is Deacon, this is Tatnia," I said with a smile. "Are you Calima?"

"I am," She responded with a slow nod. "How can I help you?"

"The bartender said you have experience flying some of the larger [Corellian Engineering](#) ships."

The woman put her datapad down, studying both of us for a long second before nodding and leaning back in her chair.

"That's true, though once you know one... you know the rest," She admitted, a slight Corellian accent carrying through her voice. "At least for most CEC ships. Are you looking for a pilot?"

"We are. We have a modified C-ROC Gozanti class, and while we can fly her, we are looking to expand the crew."

"A C-ROC?" She asked, narrowing her eyes. "A lot of... bad people use those ships. You aren't pirates, are you? Smugglers? Because I won't work for the Hutts or for anyone breaking the law in that way."

"We aren't pirates, and we aren't smugglers," I assured her. "Maybe I could tell you a bit about how we got started and what we plan on doing, then you can decide if you're interested?"

After a moment of thinking, she nodded, taking a sip of the refill we brought before gesturing for me to start.

"Well, I'm from a backwater planet in the middle of nowhere. I managed to leave but almost immediately got snapped up by slavers...."

As I talked, I could see the sympathy in her eyes, switching to approval as we described some of the raids on the slaver businesses that we did. I talked around the fact that Nevue was a rebel because openly admitting that while in public would be stupid, but I shared enough for her to get the gist of the story. Of course, I also left out my abilities.

"That... well, it's certainly a story," She said when I was done. "Glad to see you're making the best of a bad round of Sabbacc."

"We play the hand we are dealt," I responded with a shrug. "I wish we could have made it off Nar Shaddaa without throwing up as many flags, but I won't pretend to be sad we got to make our start off Hutt money."

"I can imagine. You know...people would find the fact that the Hutts might be after you worrying and a solid reason to deny your offer...."

"Maybe, but I'm not sure we want anyone on the team who couldn't stand the idea," I explained. "Plus, this is going to be an active position. We will see violence, and any pilot we hire needs to be okay with that."

"Do you plan on fighting them more?" She asked, watching me closely. "You might be able to slip under their scanners or even pay them back...."

"Yeah, not capitulating to them, that's for sure," I said, shaking my head. "If we stumble on a slaver ring or there's a bounty on slavers, those are more than acceptable. I'm a bit worried that my team won't be ready to go against the Hutts openly, not yet at least."

"That... is reasonable. The truth is, I have a bit of history with a few of the Hutts. I'm not exactly openly hunted... but they do not like me very much."

"How in the hell did you manage that?" Tatnia asked, leaning forward. "The Hutts and their cartels are happy to kill their own people just for the fun of it, how did you piss them off and not get put on a hunted list?"

"The Hutts might be... conniving, greedy, selfish piles of bantha shit, but they aren't stupid, and they don't waste money," The Tholothian explained. "I signed a contract to pilot for a group that turned out to be a front. When I learned I was piloting ships with spice stuffed in the deck paneling, I managed to get out of the contract with all my pay. They were pissed... but not enough to call for bounty hunters."

"Does that have anything to do with why you haven't been hired?" I asked. "Did you get blacklisted?"

"Most people see any negative involvement with the Hutts... and their syndicates as a big enough issue to pass me over," She explained. "I don't see the issue, it's not as if it's as exciting as your story."

"Well, I happen to see it as a good sign. Are you interested in working with us?"

"I... have to admit, I am," She responded, leaning forward. "How does the payment work?"

"You would be paid a portion of the payout from whatever job, salvage, or bounty we complete," I explained with a smile. "If the payouts are under a certain amount, we will just divvy it out entirely, but over an amount, we will split a percentage, and the rest will go to improving

our equipment, future repairs, fuel, docking, supplies, things like that. Oh, and living expenses, we will cover those as well."

"And what would my share look like?"

I pause, looking confused for a moment before Tatnia lets out an amused huff.

"She means what percent of the payout will she see," She explained while looking at me before looking back at our potential pilot. "And he is confused because he thought it was obvious. Everyone gets an equal share."

"Truly? What about him?" She asked, looking at me with a raised eyebrow.

"The same as everyone else," Tatnia confirmed. "He did it without any prompting, the very first time we made money, when it was just three of us."

"I might be the leader, but everyone works together to get the job done," I explained with a shrug. "Why should I get paid more just because they call me Boss? I've had enough shit jobs to know better."

Calima looked at Tatnia with a surprised and curious look, the human woman smirking and nodding in return.

"Yes, you just heard that, and yes, he actually believes that," she answered. "As far as I can tell, at least."

"Well... That settles it," Calima said, holding out her hand. "I would be very interested in working with you and your team, Deacon."

"Great!" I said with a smile, reaching out to shake her hand. "Now let's talk about time frames..."

Unsurprisingly, Calima was eager to get started, having spent the last three weeks watching her savings slowly go down as she waited for someone to come by and hire her. We talked about the ship, about how it was a recovered CIS cruiser that still had some of its automation intact. We also went over what else was expected of her beyond piloting.

"We expect you to help defend the ship, but no, we wouldn't expect you to come on our more violent mission. In fact, having someone to hold down the fort is half of why I want a dedicated pilot."

"It's definitely not my strong suit, but I know how to take care of myself," She assured us. "I'm a halfway decent shot with my pistol and have *some* starfighter training."

"We will keep that in mind," I assured her.

When we were done, and all our questions were answered, I took a picture of her and sent it to Nal through my commlink. When I was done telling the Duros that she would be on her way in a few hours, she left to go back to her temporary lodgings to grab her stuff. I handed her a fifty credit ingot to help cover the air speeder, and she looked at me for a long moment after taking it, taking and laughing after looking at Tatnia, who just rolled her eyes.

"You're too nice, Boss, but most taxis don't take ingots," She said, shaking her head. "I would be more worried that you were going to get suckered if I didn't know you're too paranoid for that."

"You know me so well, Tatnia," I responded with a smirk. "The coin was so I could track her if something happens."

"... Like I said, paranoid."

We left the bar, waving down another air speeder and climbing in. After a short conversation with the driver, who was actually organic, we were once again crossing the city, high in the air. After a ten-minute ride, we were dropped off at another bar, this one considerably more rough looking.

"Are we sure we should be recruiting from here?" I asked as we crossed a courtyard-like area to get to the bar. "Getting a 'bad side of town' vibe from this place."

"Really?" She asked, giving me a side look. "Just wait until we go to bars on outskirts worlds, this place looks downright pleasant compared to some of them."

We went inside, stopping by the entrance. This place was even more packed than the last, with only a few open tables that I could see. Luckily, as we got closer to the bar, someone who had been sitting by an empty space stood up, letting Tatnia and me sit down without issues.

Just like before, we spent a few minutes making small talk, slowly sipping our drinks. This time our conversation was primarily about if we should buy a transport speeder now or try and pick one up along the way.

"I think we should just buy one," Tatnia said with a shrug. "We need a few too many things out of it to rely on finding the perfect match. Besides, if we *do* find a better one down the road, we could always sell it."

"I'm just a bit hesitant to spend a bunch of money before making a bit of a buffer," I explained, taking a sip of my beer.

"Transport is too important," Tatnia pointed out. "We need a few speeder bikes and a transport speeder. Being able to move around once we land on a planet is important. We can hire taxis here, but when we are transporting a bounty? Or assaulting a pirate base?"

"Yeah, alright, fair enough. Alright, we can-"

"Excuse me," A voice said from behind us, prompting both of us to turn around. "I couldn't help but overhear. You said you are looking for speeders?"

Standing there was a human, about twenty, maybe twenty-five years old, with black hair and brown eyes. His hand was wrapped in a bandage, and he had a bacta pack on his cheek, the rest of his face slightly off color like the very tail end of a bad bruise.

"Can we help you?" Tatnia asked, her hand sliding downward, something the beaten man noticed.

"Ah. Well. You're looking for transport? A speeder and some bikes, right?" He asked, to which I nodded slowly. "Good. I have an offer, a way you could make a bit of money and get what you're looking for. I can explain everything, but... maybe at a more private table?"

Tatnia and I shared a look, and with a shrug I stood, my crewmate standing with me.

"Alright, lead the way."

He nodded and led us to a table in the far back of the bar, handing a waitress a credit ingot and a few words as we sat, the woman nodding and rushing away. He seemed to sit down slowly, like someone who was in pain.

"So, my names Julus, Julus Centall," He started, reaching across the relatively small table to shake our hands. "Thanks for hearing me out."

"No problem, I'm Deacon, and this is Tatnia," I responded. "Just to be clear, we are just listening. What exactly are you proposing?"

"Okay, right, so you can tell I am a little roughed up?" He asked, raising his bandaged hand. "So this happened two weeks ago. Zandev and I, we...."

He paused for a moment, seeming to hold something back before continuing.

"We were coming home one night and got dropped off in the wrong part of the city. We... well, we had been *celebrating* our latest paycheck, so we didn't notice until we landed. Before we could get a ride home, we were ambushed."

"Ambushed? By what?"

"A gang, the Blood Cores. They claim a small garage in the corner of the lower Gyveresu District on the east side," He answered, shaking his head. "They are a tiny little gang, no more than eight people, and we just happened to get stuck on their turf."

He paused, shifting in his seat slightly, looking down at his hands while letting a long breath go.

"While we were waiting for a cab when they showed up, starting getting aggressive," He explained, shaking his head. "I'm not bad in a fight, and... I get cocky when I drink. I tried to tell them to get lost, got in one of their faces, and.... they took offense to that. They took turns beating the snot out of me. When Zander tried to stop them they killed him."

The waitress came along and brought us drinks, putting a glass of water in front of Julius. He grabbed the glass and stared at it for a moment before recovering.

"Zandev was like a... hells, he was my brother. I knew him for most of my life. And I got him killed because I can't keep my mouth shut when I get buzzed," He explained, taking a long drink of water before wiping his face and his eyes. "Sorry, it's been two weeks, but..."

"It's alright, take your time," I said gently, the young man nodding.

"Right, okay. So the Blood Cores ride around on five speeder bikes and a speeder. I don't know how they got their hands on them, but their bikes are [C-PH](#) models, military tech," He said, shaking his head clear before continuing. "I think the air speeder was a modified Arrow-10 Light. It's enclosed, carries four people, and it's got a turret. That's what you're looking for, right?"

"How do you know all this information about them?" Tatnia asked, narrowing her eyes. "That's a lot of information about a group you met once, two weeks ago."

"...I don't think I could ever forget a single detail of that night," He admitted with a deceptively normal shrug. "And I did my research, as best as I could anyway."

"So... what exactly are you looking for from us?" I asked, wanting to confirm my suspicion.

"Right. I'm willing to pay you five thousand credits to wipe the Blood Cores out. No warning, no second chances, no chance to wiggle out on technicalities or for good behavior," he explained coldly. "You can take their gear when you're done, I don't care. I just want them dead."

"I'm not opposed to being called in for a little justice, especially when I'm getting paid for it and get the salvage," I admitted before sharing a look with Tatnia. "But we are actually here to recruit more members. At the moment, we only have three active combatants on our crew."

"I could help," He offered. "I'm a bit roughed up, but nothing would stop me from putting them down."

"Be that as it may-"

"Please, the fact that you just happen to be looking for something they have and are looking for work...." He trailed off. "I don't have enough money to hire anyone, and most people would consider the salvage a bonus, not part of the pay. But since you're looking for that kind of stuff..."

Tatnia and I share another look, and this time I give a subtle shrug. She groans in response and rolls her eyes.

"Alright, tell us everything you've learned, everything you know about this gang," she said, leaning forward. "After that, we will discuss it with our team."