

Nova led us into the ship through the forward entry ramp because the primary cargo elevator was being used to move parts in and out of the large ship. As we climbed up the ramp, we first [stepped into a locker room area with sealed doors](#) on both sides.

"This ship was originally a Separatist transport and was only recently recovered from a previously unknown dormant stronghold," Nova explained as she led us through the locker room. "The separatists were primarily known for their droid army, but almost all ships like these did have an organic crew in control, supported by droids."

As we stepped through the opposite door, we entered into a much larger cargo area, which was mostly empty save three workers and a bunch of tools. They were focused on their task, and only one noticed their boss walking through the ship.

"The C-ROC was an in-house modification to the Gozanti class cruiser, which had been out for several years before the start of the Clone Wars. It was basically an attempt to revitalize the ship by fixing up a few issues, adding cargo storage on the wings, and moderately improving the hull composition while adding the sloping, shovel-like nose," The shipbroker stopped in the middle of the large cargo bay. "The Separatists took a portion of them and modified them even further, stripping out a lot of the bottom nose section for even more cargo storage. Between the wings and this bay, you have an incredible amount of storage or room for modifications. Pirates like to take these ships and turn them into overpowered gunboats or mine-layers."

She turned and walked through a large bay door, which was currently knocked off its rail and bent slightly. She waved to a pair of verpine workers, who bobbed their heads a bit in what I think was a greeting. Further in the room, I could see the cargo elevator lifting things up into the cargo bay.

"This area has a small amount of storage space but primarily leads to the outboard cargo storage. These heavy sealed doors lead to a small maglock cargo space, each about three meters wide. Each row has a mag-field in place past the doors for extra protection, but I wouldn't rely on it. The bay doors are what keeps the space out. These grates..."

Stomped her feet on a grate, which, now that I looked, stood out from the rest of the floor plating. I could see a flushed hinge on one side of each panel.

"This is the access to the repair crawlway for emergency repairs. Much easier to access everything from the outside, but you work with what you can. There's more in the forward cargo bay."

We left back the way we came, Nova pointing out the hatches she had just mentioned as we walked around to a set of stairs. We climbed them to the second floor, exiting the stairwell into a long with doors on both sides and at each end.

"This is the floor where the organic crew would spend most of their time," She explained, gesturing down one end, the door marked with noticeable damage. "The ship maintained a small deployment of droids, but the controls and communications equipment went with the room it was stored in down there. We already junked most of it and sealed up the access from the floor below. It will be an empty space when we are done with it. Access to the internals for the smallest ion drive is back there as well. We are thinking about just removing it because it's so undersized it's hardly worth the upkeep."

She then gestured in the other direction before walking down the hall. We passed a repair droid carrying a heavy-looking part while a human worker walked behind it, waving a scanner around.

"When it arrived, the ship was built around a crew of five, with room for five more passengers. We plan on moving things around a bit, with the end result being a max capacity of twelve. The bedrooms will be cramped, but the lounge area more than makes up for it."

We stepped through an automatic door and into said lounge area, which was easily six or seven meters wide and just as long, which on a spaceship was shockingly luxurious. At the moment, the room was mostly empty save a kitchen system, which actually looked like a kitchen, complete with countertop and stools bolted to the floor. There were also two couches tucked in another corner, but both of them were old and could do with replacing.

"Some of the furniture was damaged, but we have replacements already lined up," She explained before we stepped through the final sealed doorway.

A thick security door slid open to reveal the cockpit, which, as far as I could tell, was completely intact. There were five chairs set up, one in the front and four facing along the side of the vaguely triangular room.

"For all their faults, the separatists knew their way around automating a ship. In a pinch, one person could fly this entire ship, even keep the guns firing. But for better results, you have the copilot, two gunners, and the comms operator, who would double as a sensor specialist. And the pilot, obviously."

Nal stepped past me and sat down in the pilot's chair, closely examining the layout. After a few seconds, he looked back at me.

"I could fly it. Probably. CEC keeps their ships easy to use," He explained, scratching his chin. "Separatists changed very little."

"So you can handle it, but we should look for a full-time pilot?" I asked, Nal responding with a simple nod. "Alright, sounds good."

I turned to Nova, who was giving me an amused look, clearly curious as to where I was getting my confidence.

"How much for it, right now, with no more repairs?"

"As it is? Eighty thousand credits. But I wouldn't take your money, especially 'cause you're a friend of Nevue. This ship isn't safe as she is," She said emphatically, shaking her head. "The first floor doesn't hold pressure, and the back room is more melted slag than ship. Not to mention the top engine is barely worth scrapping. This ship needs thirty thousand credits of repairs before I would even *consider* letting someone buy it. Another forty thousand on top of that to get it to the kind of quality I built my business on."

"I get that," I said with a nod. "I'll give you eighty thousand credits to buy the ship. You take it, put it somewhere safe, it's yours. I'll give you another twenty thousand to keep working on the repairs."

"That's not enough. Even with the friend of a friend discount."

"I know, which is why, while you're working on my ship, we go and take care of your job."

"My job?" Nova asks, her eyes narrowing as she looks at me. "What do you mean?"

"C'mon, I know how this works. Someone like you running a business like this? For as long as you have?" I said, gesturing widely. "Maybe there's a rumor you want investigated, or you have a line on some supplies you need. Maybe there is something special someone wants, or a big score tucked away somewhere you can't get to. There is *always* a job. Usually, more than one."

Nevue, who was standing behind Nova, looked at me with a raised eyebrow, clearly wondering when I had gone insane. I could practically hear Miru rolling her eyes beside me. Nal was the only one nodding in agreement, having spun the pilot's chair around.

"Boss, what are-" Miru started before Nova spoke up.

"Alright. Say I have something in mind. You would need a ship."

"We have one."

"Excuse me?" Nevue said, breaking into the conversation. "Ignoring the mind-boggling fact that Deacon was *right* about what he just said, you don't have a ship. The Rebellion has a ship that we agreed to use to ferry you here."

"Then we cut the Rebellion in," I said, giving Nova a look. "It's gotta be a big one, right? Something that could stand to make everyone a lot of money or a bunch of supplies? Maybe both?"

For a long moment, Nova was silent before finally letting out a grumble of confirmation.

"Fine, I do have *something* in mind. It's actually got to do with this ship and why it's so heavily damaged," She admitted. "But we aren't talking about it here. We are already slowing everyone down. Come on, we can talk business in my conference room."

-----

It took us a few minutes to get back to the conference room that Nova had mentioned. It was a decent-sized table in a sealed-off room, with a holoprojector unit built into the table. Nothing special, all function over form. Tatnia and the second soldier, Lario, had joined us as well. The ship was safe here, and the money was already Nova's, assuming I could hammer out this deal.

"I have a few different crews that bring me ships now and again. Some I hire, and some just work on a contract. Carlion was a ship chaser that I had worked with on a few occasions and usually brought good stuff in," The older shipbroker started, leaning back in her chair, which I couldn't help but notice was a fair bit nicer than the ones everyone else was sitting in. "This time, though, I went to him. I've been sitting on a rumor of an old CIS base in the Outer Rim for a few months now. It was just a rumor, one I was pretty sure was a load of crap, but with your friends always needing ships...."

She trailed off, giving Nevue a look before she leaned forward and tapped on a control pad in front of her, the holoprojector lighting up and displaying a slowly rotating planet.

"This is... P-3 something something something. Just call it Stronghold," She said, ignoring that the planet's alphanumeric code appeared with the projection. "Its air is barely breathable, its weather is erratic and dangerous, and its home to, surprise surprise, a relatively large dormant CIS stronghold. Carlion and his crew landed their ship and investigated the base. Of course, since they were looking for ships to sell, that's where they started."

She tapped the control pad, and the projection changed, shifting to footage that appeared to be from the point of view of a landing ship. It showed several fortified structures, including a decent-sized hangar and a row of ships on a large landing pad, the C-ROC being the largest. The view spun as the ship landed, settling down by the C-ROC.

"Stop!" Miru called out, prompting Nova to press the pad to pause the feed before giving the young Twi'lek a look. "Go back like five seconds...aannndddd stop!"

Nova slowly reversed the footage, going until Miru called out again. As the view spun while the ship rotated to land, there was a two-second shot of a massive dish array sitting on top of the largest structure. It was also clearly destroyed, with a large chunk missing from one side and large portions of it blackened, slagged and destroyed.

"Well... That explains why it's still there," I said, leaning forward, "And it makes me feel a bit better about not having any surprise company. Good eyes, Miru."

I said, reaching over and squeezing her shoulder, getting a big smile in return. Nova looked impressed, nodding in agreement.

"Well, that's a bit of good luck. It almost makes up for what happened next," Nova said, leaning back in her comfortable chair again. "They were just starting to explore the second floor of the C-ROC when the stronghold defenses kicked in and started targeting their original ship. Realizing they didn't have much time, Carlion ordered his ship to take off, stranding him and two of his team. They worked for a few hours to get the C-ROC up and running, and when they did, they took off. The defenses took exception to that and tried to blast them out of the air too. They barely managed to limp back here, where Carlion retired on the spot when he saw just how karking wrecked the ship was."

"And you want us to go back there for the smaller ships?" Tatnia asked. "Seems like a big risk for a couple of transports and whatever's in the hangar."

"No, but if it goes well, we will get those, too," Nova answered, shaking her head. "If I had known there was something like this there, I wouldn't have sent Carlion, I would have hired someone with a bit more smarts. A base like this will have a central computer, and the side effect of automating everything is that everything stops when that stops. If you can get one of my slicer droids to the central computer, we could shut down the automated defenses along with everything else. But that's only the beginning. Because if that data core of that central computer is still intact, then there's going to be a lot of information on it. Things like supply depots, trade lanes, troop movements, and even shipyards. Now most of that is going to be long gone. But with a little luck and some smarts...."

"We could get our hands on a whole lot of resources," Nevue finished, leaning forward in his chair. "This... yeah, I'm in. Ayme, Lario?"

"Yeah, count me in," Lario responded eagerly.

"Just let the General know so she doesn't send someone to come looking for us," Ayme added.

"That just leaves one thing...What is everyone's cut?"

"Forty to the Rebellion, forty to Nova, and twenty to us," I suggested. "Not including the remaining repairs and a few extras for the C-ROC. And, I want in on any future finds you get off of the data core, if there are any. You'll need muscle anyway, and by then we will have expanded a bit."

"You realize that there aren't going to be any credits lying around," Nova pointed out. "And I want those ships on the landing pad."

"I know, and I'm alright with that," I agreed with a nod. "You can buy us out of our shares if we don't find anything we want, but I have a feeling we will end up finding some useful stuff."

"If the Rebellion agrees to split your buyout if you need it, then I can agree to that aspect," Nova said before crossing her arms. "But there needs to be a certain level of profit involved to cover all of the repairs, even with your twenty thousand inclusion."

"I'de think the shuttles and the other ships on the pad would cover that at least," I pointed out.

"Not after calculating profits and the cost of repair and updating them."

"Fine. If you fail to double the cost of my repairs, half of the cost will come from our cut," I offered.

"And if the whole thing comes apart?" She asks. "How do you pay for it then?"

"I will join the Rebellion," I said, looking at Nevue. "They can cover the repairs and a decent payout for my team if they don't want to join as well."

"Done!" Nevue said quickly, surprising the two rebel soldiers and Nova with his eagerness.

Nova looked back at me, suddenly analyzing me much closer than before, no doubt wondering why Nevue was so eager to recruit me to the cause. Guess my magic had made more of an impression than he had let on. Then again, I had been banking on that.

"Alright, that sounds like we have an agreement?" I asked, getting nods from everyone. "Good. Let's move onto the planning phase, I want at least a rough outline of what we are doing before committing ourselves."