

The first successful sale to Yarlo was an important step closer to our goal, but it was not just a one-and-done mission. We had told the intermediary that we would have more things to sell, so we needed to back that up. First, we returned to Omega Station and filled the *Chariot* with a small pile of choice artifacts before heading back out. Then, for just under two weeks straight, we would travel to Tatooine, sell a few artifacts, and play the role of disgruntled and underpaid mercenaries. We would then leave the planet and jump into deep space, where the *Chariot* and *Loyal Hound* were waiting.

We would then use the *Brick* to transfer a few more artifacts over to the *Starcaller* before repeating the process. We made sure to keep at least two days between each visit in order to keep the illusion we were traveling much further than we actually were. The whole charade was designed to make it look like we were being treated like a glorified delivery service, watching our clients make tons of money while we were getting scraps.

The need to wait between each delivery to create the illusion of traveling meant we all had a large amount of free time. Because it was so cramped inside the *Starcaller*, some of the crew would transfer over to the *Chariot* on the *Brick*, stretching their legs and taking advantage of the cleared cargo bay. Personally, I spent most of my free time enchanting gear for our new crew. I managed to finish the three dex enhancers each for our pilots and some of the crew of our latest ships, which had been my first priority. I also finished the strength and dex mix for the clone ground team, as well as a few bits and bobs, before finally stopping. I would have liked to continue, but it became clear I had a new issue.

I was running out of filled soul gems.

I still had a lot of unmodified, unfilled Kyber crystals I could convert, but I would still need to go hunting again, which was not something I could just do at the drop of a hat. Even worse, while I could technically apply Soul Trap to weapons, only low-tech ones like bows and swords would work. I wasn't about to send anyone out to hunt big game with a fucking *bow*. There were some options, but it didn't quite matter at the moment, as we were busy working on our current mission anyway. When this mission was settled, I would work on solving my soul gem problem. Until then, I would just have to find something else to do.

After about a week, or halfway through working on our current mission, we got word that the main fleet's pirate bounty was complete and that they had returned to Omega Base. The mission details were sent over the Holonet, and I couldn't help but whistle appreciatively when I first read it.

Apparently, they had managed to use some bait to track down the pirate's home base, a jungle planet in the Mid Rim. From there, they ambushed them, taking the pirate fleet mostly by surprise. A few of their starfighters managed to take off, but our guys were ready, having already deployed the V-wings, which made quick work of them. While the pirate group didn't have any capital ships, they did have a freighter that was in pretty good condition, eight remaining intact starfighters, and a whole selection of goods and equipment.

Most of the supplies, as well as five of the remaining starfighters, were sold to the Rebellion for two hundred and fifty thousand credits. We also received another sixty-five thousand for the main bounty, as well as various other side bounties. Three of the starfighters, a trio of old but serviceable [Y-Wings](#) of all things, we kept, as well as the [freighter](#). Once they were repaired, the new bombers would be folded into our starfighter wings, and the freighter would join our two other cargo ships transporting food and equipment and whatever else the quartermaster ordered.

Altogether, it was a solid win for the fleet and a testament to Captain Pella Irsee's abilities. He and his crew proved to be capable, though really, they were never really at risk. We had almost double the amount of starfighters as the pirates alone. Between them, the *Intervention* and the *Nautilus*, it was always going to be a one-sided fight. Still, the patience and ability to set up an ambush to maximize the resources and credits we gained was very encouraging. Since we anticipated being busy for quite a while longer, I told the fleet leaders to give their crews some time off while they started looking for a new bounty or target.

Meanwhile, we continued our delivery service, making a few hundred thousand credits in the process, though almost all of it was going to go back into the Jedi and their new home. We had already purchased a good amount of temporary structures, and Miru was looking into buying and repurposing a starship-grade shield system to project over their base.

Knight Amescoll, after returning to the hidden world, discussed the possibility of leaving the island, at least temporarily, to build a larger settlement on one of the many continents. Almost everyone agreed with the idea, and those that didn't were ambivalent. According to the reports, they had already started looking for a new location, and several exciting spots had already been picked out.

It would take time and resources, but the credits made from the artifacts were already going a pretty far way. With any luck, within a few weeks, we would have a safe planet for the Skyforged Vanguard, as well as any Force we found.

It made me consider going out to find Yoda, or some of the other Force-sensitive groups or people that were out there. The only problem with that was that my foreknowledge was making me feel guilty. I knew there were Jedi or Jedi adjacent groups out there hiding. I also knew that together, they would be stronger and be able to do more. What I was guilty about was the fact that most of the people who had survived to this point would have normally been safe through the Rebellion. If I went out and collected them, I would absolutely be ruining that assured survival.

There was also the worry that gathering too many Force-sensitive people together would somehow let the Emperor track us down. There was a lot of conflicting evidence and stories about just how well Old Palpy could do that. Yoda lived next to a dark side wellspring to hide his presence in the Force, and yet dozens of other Jedi, including Ahsoka and others, remained untraceable. Was it because Yoda was just particularly powerful in the Force? If that was true, why didn't he feel the surviving padawans on the ancient planet?

It was not an easy subject to grapple with, and I was tempted to bring Ahsoka in on it just to get her opinion on it. I was also tempted to go to Dahgobah and chat with Yoda. Unfortunately, any of that would have to wait until after this mission was complete, as we had bigger things to focus on.

As usual, we took images of our next "batch" of artifacts, sending them to Yarlo to confirm. This latest delivery contained several artifacts we knew he would like, including the remaining large metal coins that we had found. Yarlo loved the first batch and paid a good chunk of credits for them. This time, however, his response felt a bit different. We had informed Yarlo that we had another batch, and while he had been interested in the large metal coins, his message had hinted that this delivery would be different.

We landed on Tatooine, the *Starcaller* touching down on a random plot of desert. After quickly deploying the speeders with practiced hands, we took off to Mos Espa.

"What are the chances we are flying into a trap?" I asked Tatnia, who was piloting the Arrow while I manned the turret.

"Depends on what you mean by trap," She responded, glancing over her shoulder at me. "Do I think they are about to try and kill us? No, they need us too much. Do I think they might try and trap us into having to help them? That is much more likely. That said, we have been doing a pretty good job of playing the disgruntled employee. Even bastards like the Hutts know that working with people who want to is better than working with people you have to force."

"And when you're done, then you betray them," I pointed out, Tatnia snorting and nodding.

"Pretty much. Always assume that a Hutt is working an angle. They will have no qualms about screwing over everyone they work with," She explained. "Hutts only ever really respect other Hutts, and they still fuck each other over whenever they can."

I chuckled and nodded, both from what she said and from the fact that my Earth curses had finally started to spread throughout my team.

We landed around the same area as usual, working our way through the city to the same bar. We didn't bother with the bartender, and hadn't since our second delivery. Instead, we headed directly back to Yarlo's room, the thick security door opening after another quick scan. The grumpy old man waved us in as usual, watching as Vaz, Nal, and Tatnia all dropped off crates along his desk. He immediately got to work, opening each one to analyze the artifacts inside, confirming that they were authentic. It was a bit tedious to watch him for so long, but I couldn't blame him for taking his job seriously. I can't imagine a Hutt as strange as Grakkus would be very forgiving if he accidentally missed a forgery.

When he was finally done looking over everything, he moved the crates down behind his desk before leaning forward.

"Well done, another batch of genuine artifacts," He said with a smile, one of only a few I'd seen him make. "You have been nothing but professional about this, which is why Grakkus would like to make you an offer."

The old man leaned back in his chair, studying all of us but mostly focusing his attention on me.

"While Grakkus considers himself to be a collector at heart, he is also a businessman. Which is why, when presented with an opportunity to use his... Business acumen to expand his collection in a cost-effective manner, he is very interested," He explained, steepling his hands like he was an overly dramatic supervillain. "He would like to propose a business opportunity for you."

"... What sort of opportunity."

"While Grakkus has been very impressed with the quality and breadth of what you have presented on behalf of your clients, he finds himself unhappy with continuously paying such high prices," He explained. "He has spent quite a bit of credits so far, and now he believes he has spent enough."

"Then our clients will have to find another buyer-"

"Or, you could switch clients," The old man explained, trying to be coy. "If you aid Grakkus with discovering where your clients are unearthing these artifacts, Grakkus will pay you a hefty sum, and you would no longer be stuck with your current contract."

"And how exactly can I trust anything you just said?" I asked, shaking my head. "Hutts are notorious for betraying their business partners. I have no intention of getting my team killed."

"I understand, I'm not the best to speak of this deal, however. Grakkus would like to invite you and your companions to his Palace to make the official offer himself."

I leaned back in faked surprise, doing my best to keep my excitement calm. This was exactly what we were hoping for. We just needed to keep from seeming too excited.

"Again, I ask, why exactly should we trust you and your boss?"

"Well, for one thing, consider the fact that you are the only group around at the moment that could lead him to what he wants," he pointed out. "Further, we have been doing a little research into your group. The Skyforged Vanguard has been developing a reputation, one that Grakkus respects. This could very well mark the start of a long, prosperous relationship."

"If you know who we are, you must know we don't exactly have the best connections with Hutts in general."

"We are, but Grakkus doesn't hold that against you. Yes, slavery is a prosperous business, but you can't exactly expect the product to enjoy the process. Sometimes, they fight back. It's just the cost of doing business." He said, casually waving away the incident that

started my life here in this universe. "He did, however, mention cashing in a few of his own favors to wipe your sins clean, if this potential deal was to go through. Think about it. No more worrying about Jabba coming to hunt you down every time you pass through Hutt space. Or do business here."

I could practically feel all of us struggling to keep our cool after that. Slavery was a part of life in this part of the galaxy, especially on Tatooine, but to hear it talked about so casually was disturbing.

"It is good to hear that he is willing to be so reasonable," I said, thankful to be behind a helmet. "But I'm not ruining our reputation while shaking hands with an intermediary."

He smiled and nodded as if expecting the statement.

"Grakkus wouldn't expect anything less. With something this important, he wants to shake your hand himself," He explained. "He has asked that you deliver the next batch of artifacts directly to him. This should give you enough time to negotiate a proper deal. You are now officially above my pay grade."

Yarlo handed me a crate of credits, as well as a data chip, no doubt containing the instructions for how to actually get to and land at Grakkus's Palace. He seemed remarkably happy for someone who was losing a constant influx of work, but past this, I didn't care enough to ask. Instead, I simply took the chip and left, the rest of the team following me out.

As usual, we remained silent until we left Mos Espa and arrived at the *Starcaller*. This time, however, I mimed that we should continue to be silent. I found Racer in the cockpit with Ahsoka and motioned to her to stay quiet as well. I quickly handed Racer the chip, and the astromech did a quick physical scan before diving into the programming. Eventually, after nearly two minutes, he confirmed that no listening or tracking devices had been built in.

"Sorry, I just wanted to make sure we were free to talk," I explained, letting out a long breath.

"I take it the meeting went well?" She asked.

"If what Yarlo said was true, Grakkus is eager to meet us to discuss how exactly we are going to convince our "clients" to give us the location of the dig site," I explained. "I get the feeling he is also looking to invest in us specifically. He sees us as a simple mercenary group of rising power and wants to get a leash on us early."

"We need to be careful," Ahsoka pointed out, voicing sentiments we all shared, but was worth repeating anyway. "If he thinks he has a way to get what he wants without paying us, he will take it. It's like a defining part of their culture."

"I know. We need to make every step as if we are walking into a trap," I agreed. "Still, we are one step closer to getting into that vault."

Ahsoka nodded and sat back in her chair, spinning it around after a few seconds so she could focus on the takeoff checklist. Tatnia once again joined her on the bridge after a few minutes, already stripped down from her armor.

For what felt like the dozenth time, everyone quickly boarded and settled into the *Starcallers* accommodations. Our first destination was back at Omega Station, as we had a few things to pick up before we could settle into the *Talos Chariot* for the next leg of our mission.

With any luck, it would be the last time in quite a while before we ever had to come back to Tatooine. As much as people liked to make fun of the movies for the infamous line, the sand really did suck, and I would be glad to be done with it for as long as possible.