

We spent another day at the Separatist stronghold, sleeping in several floors of apartment-esque rooms and living off of ship supplies. Nevue, Ayme, and Lario were the first to leave, the dozens of rebels and several ships they brought making quick work of the supplies, equipment, weapons, and starfighters they were taking with them. Nevue, my crew, and the soldiers shared a drink before they left, sitting in one of the larger lounge areas that were dotted along the living spaces.

"I'm already forming my new crew," Nevue explained, gesturing to Ayme and Lario, the latter of which raised his glass. "I might not get to rejoin my old team, but at least I'm not starting over with a completely new group."

"Are they saddling you with the B-7 too?" I asked, looking skeptical.

"Thank the Force, no. We are heading back to Thalia, where I'm looking to recruit a few more specialists. Once I'm done, our first assignment will be stealing an imperial ship," He explained with a shrug.

"Seriously?" Tatnia asked, her eyes wide with surprise. "Real trial by fire, huh?"

"Well, I'll be gathering experienced operatives, so they expect a certain level of results," He explained. "Plus, we can do it from any world in the galaxy, which will give us the advantage of surprise."

"We wish you good luck," Nal added, reaching out and shaking the Zabrak's hand. "May fortune favor you."

We spent a while saying goodbye, sharing a few more drinks, and making small talk, laughing about our adventure so far. When the three rebels did eventually leave, the lounge felt much more empty than it really was.

Not long after the Alliance cleared out, we were transported back to Nova's repair station, riding with her on her ship while her people stayed behind to secure the last few things they wanted. A general salvage crew that Nova was familiar with was already stripping out the furniture and general equipment from the facility, which Nova promised would add a solid chunk of credits to the final pot.

Once we were back at the station, Nova pulled me aside rather energetically.

"I just reviewed Racer's footage of the mission," She said, looking at me with a severe expression. "Are you a Jedi?"

"No, I'm not," I assured her, rather fruitlessly by her continued harsh expression. "Beyond the fact that 'Jedi' does not just mean all Force users, but rather a single sect of Force users, I don't actually use the Force at all."

"I know what a Jedi is, Deacon. I'm sixty-three years old, and my family is from Coruscant. Even if we didn't rub shoulders with senators and the like before the Empire, I could see the Jedi Temple from my bedroom."

"Right... well, did you ever see them doing their thing?"

"...No, not in person. I met a few but never saw any in action," She admitted. "But I know crazy monk bantha-shit when I see it. Anyone throwing around stuff like that is on a short and very wanted list by the Empire, even if they don't know it yet."

"I know. It's why I'm so desperate for my own ship," I explained. "I want to be able to get up and go, to stay out from under the Empire's thumb."

"And you're painting a target on my business in the process!"

"Really? Any more than regularly dealing with the Rebellion?" I asked, giving her a look and crossing my arms. "There isn't anything connecting you to the C-ROC, especially if your slicers are as good as you say."

One of the few things that kept Nova's business safe, and something she had bragged about frequently, was her team's ability to "fix" a ship's ownership so that there was nothing questionable about it. Both she and Nevue had sworn by it, which led me to believe I could trust it.

"Oh, they are," She assured me, looking mollified but still a bit frustrated. "What were you, a Padawan, during the purge?"

"No, I already told you, I'm not a Jedi or a Force user," I insisted, repeating myself. "Jedi isn't synonymous with Force users anyway."

For a long moment, she stared me down, narrowing her eyes as she tapped her desk with a single finger. She looked like she was trying to use her own mind powers to figure me out before eventually giving up.

"... When your ship is done, I want you gone," She finally said. "I have nothing against you, and I never believed the prop[aganda that the Jedi Order betrayed the Republic. But you being here puts my workers and my business in danger. I can deal with nosey Imperials trying to sniff out the Rebellion and its sympathizers, but I don't have a clue how to handle your hokey mind stuff. I'm sorry."

I stood there, a few feet into the cluttered space Nova called an office, clenching my fist in frustration. A few dozen ideas ran through my head, but all of them ranged from bad to worse. So instead, I just let out a long breath and nodded.

"What about our deal?" I asked. "If that data core turns up more salvage opportunities?"

"The Rebellion will contact you," She answered. "Nevue said he left a way for you to communicate?"

I nodded, recalling the hyperwave unit that we had recovered during our initial search for a Rebel base to drop Nevue off at. It was waiting to get loaded onto the C-ROC, along with all of our stuff and the salvaged equipment and goods from the stronghold.

"Then that's how they will get in touch," She said, leaning back in her chair. "You'll be doing business through them mostly, as they have the data core now. Unless ships are involved, I'll likely just be taking a buyout or supplies."

"Fine," I answered before turning to leave without another word.

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Despite her ultimatum, Nova honored her word and worked with Miru and me to implement the modifications to [the C-ROC](#). The first modification, removing the center thruster and replacing it with a powerful laser cannon, was relatively easy, and she and her engineers did most of the work. When Miru presented her with the design for the second modification, she was impressed.

The C-ROC had four cargo lanes on each side of its wings, each one just over two meters wide. Each lane was equipped with a cargo locking system that could either grip a container directly with a clamping mechanism or use a standard mag-lock to snap it into place. Each of these lanes had a hood for protection, as well as a mag-field to keep the air in. Past that field was a sealed door that opened into the ship's first level. There were safeties and backups all around, and the sealing door for each bay was armored as if it was an exterior access point.

The plan was to remove the cargo lane hoods and create a new, higher-up roof. This would be built with hull-rated plating and extended out significantly further. The result would be two twelve-meter-wide hangar bays with a depth of just under seven meters and a height of just under five. Both sides would have a fully-fledged, military-rated mag-field to keep the air in, as well as blast doors that would roll down from the top, offering even more protection. The interior doors would also be replaced with a singular, much larger door on each side.

[When it was done](#), we would be able to squeeze in two fighters on each side, maybe three, if their wingspans were especially small. Further, because it was a fully functional hangar, you could work on the ships while the ship was moving, even in hyperspace. Even better, the hangars could still be used as storage.

It was impressive that Miru, in a hilariously short amount of time, had taken my simple prompt of "the wings are big enough to land a starfighter on" and turned it into a legitimate plan that Nova was not only happy to implement but also interested in purchasing from Miru.

"I know half a dozen people who fly around these ships," Nova explained. "Some of them in the Rebellion. If you let me buy this from you, I plan on sending the basic idea to them. I'll be able to charge them thirty thousand credits for the modification, making a decent profit from it in the process."

Miru looked at me, and I nodded with a smile, gesturing for her to go ahead.

"How much?" Miru asked, looking back to Nova.

"Considering I have no guarantees that people will go for it? Three thousand credits."

"Five thousand."

"Three thousand five hundred."

"I'll give you the plans and one thousand credits," Miru said, catching me and Nova off guard. "In exchange for Racer."

"What?" I asked, looking at Miru. "What do we need him for?"

"Besides the fact that having a slicer droid is a good investment?" Miru asked, getting a nod of understanding from me. "The LE-repair droids can handle themselves, but he will make interfacing with the labor droids much easier. Plus, an astromech is a good droid to have around in general if we are living on a starship. The R4 series is meant for a more general repair, but it's still an astromech. If our navigator is ever broken, it could easily plot a course instead. It could probably help optimize the navigator's calculations."

"Well...Racer... has a lot of aftermarket parts." Nova explained. "I have a few droids like him, so I'm not opposed to it, but he is worth six thousand credits at least."

"Two thousand, half of which is coming from your cut of the stronghold raid," I said, directing the last half to Miru, who nodded in agreement. "And we get Racer, along with the appropriate maintenance materials."

"Done," She said with a nod, reaching out and shaking hands with both of us. "I'll send him to your rooms in a little while."

"Just send him to Miru, he will be working under her."

The repairs and modifications to the C-ROC took another week and a half, which from what Miru and Nal said, was remarkably quick. I could only imagine Nova was pushing her crew to finish the job quickly so she could be done with us and, more specifically, get me off her station.

During our week of downtime, we each kept as busy as we could, despite the fact that we were stuck on a mostly empty station. Tatnia, Nal, and I all started some basic workouts in the morning, as we had all been a little disappointed in our conditioning when compared to Ayme and Lario. We spent a few hours every morning doing sit-ups, push-ups, burpees, and anything else I could remember from gym class. It sucked, and Miru teased us for it, but if we were going to make a living off being mercenaries and fighting, we needed to be a bit more than just casually in shape.

On top of that, Nal, Tatnia, and I familiarize ourselves with the C-ROC systems, specifically the bridge. Both of them knew that I was hoping to find a permanent pilot, so we focused on being able to man the guns and the comms control station in an attempt to keep the crew number down.

When I wasn't training, I was practicing magic, learning three new spells during the downtime. I could have learned more, but Nova was already nervous about having me around, so I wanted to keep from rocking the boat as much as possible. That said, I couldn't spend that much time doing nothing and not learn *some* magic.

I ended up learning ice spike, lightning rune, and elemental familiar. I was hoping ice spike would round out my offensive options, and I learned lightning rune because the trap we had laid for the destroyer droids had left a lasting impression on me. While playing Skyrim, I had never really used the rune traps as they seemed unnecessarily reactionary. After all, why set a trap when I was perfectly capable of taking the fight to the enemy? Having now been in several life-or-death conflicts, I understood just how nice it was to not have to stick my neck out while also taking down someone trying to kill me.

The elemental familiar was interesting, as it was really three spells in one. I could now cast my familiar at what was essentially its second level while also having a choice between shock, frost, or fire. This familiar was more robust, could do moderate amounts of damage based on the element, and was significantly tougher than the baseline familiar. It could also be set to explode on command or when it was dispelled by force, just like the flame atronach. Again, I now fully appreciated any magic I could cast that would let me take down threats without putting myself in harm's way.

While I only learned three spells, I also spent some time learning what was the equivalent of another perk from the game. After familiarizing myself with the lightning form of elemental familiar, I found an entry in my grimoire that definitely wasn't there before. It specifically focused on spellcasters who favored lightning, teaching me a trick that would

basically allow me to save mana on each cast or spend the normal amount and increase the power of the spell significantly.

Basically, it boiled down to me overclocking or removing different parts of the spell matrix, relying on inherited properties of a sparks spell to keep the spell stable and, in some cases, prevent any kickback. As far as I could tell from the few times I tried it out in an abandoned room in the station, it reduced the mana needed for a spell by a third. Alternatively, it seemed to increase the potency by around a fifth, though I had no way to be sure.

While Nai, Tatnia, and I were training in various different ways, Miru was having a blast on the C-ROC, either watching her modifications come to life or doing her own modifications, specifically setting up her workshop. With my permission, she set up in the front nose of the ship, under the bridge. On one side, she set up workbenches, tools, a computer terminal, and everything she would need for her work and tinkering. On the other side, she set up a storage and charging station for the droids, setting up space for the LE repair droids, the PK Labor droids, and a space for Racer as well, though his station was in her workshop. The PK and LE droids, who had been helping her put everything together, were already stored in their stations, which just made it all the more clear that she had made room for a lot of new droids, which I could only imagine were for her future projects.

When the ship was finally finished, Tatnia was attempting to teach me Sabbacc when Nova came down to find us.

"She's done," She said unceremoniously with a blank face. "It's time for you to leave."

My crew, who up to this point hadn't been aware of the shipbroker's ultimatum, were clearly surprised by her sudden change in demeanor. Tatnia stood, ready to say something, but I stopped her.

"Alright, give us a bit to pack, and then we will get out of your hair," I said simply.

The older woman looked like she was about to say something, perhaps apologize or explain herself, but instead, she simply nodded before turning to leave.