

With our first proper mercenary mission completed, we left Itander behind a few hours after Rabben stopped by to say goodbye. Once in space, Miru deployed the raindrop fighters out of the hangar bay, directing them up and under the ship, where the mag-lock and cargo clamps locked them against the hull. When they attached, a muffled thud reverberated through the ship.

"Ookay, the raindrops are properly attached," Miru said with a smile. "We are good to go!"

"Great," Julius said, having joined Miru and I down in the hangar bay for the occasion. "Where are we going?"

"For now? The middle of nowhere so we can have a group meeting," I responded, Miru, Julius, and Racer all following as I made my way up to the bridge. "We have some options to discuss."

It took a few minutes to get everyone together, Calima the last one to arrive since she was plotting a course to a random spot in nearby space. We made a quick two-minute jump to the edge of the Itander system before the Tholothian left the bridge and sat down at the large lounge table.

"Alright. So our first mercenary mission was a rather resounding success," I said with a smile, everyone cheering and patting each others backs. "Everyone performed great, we got some decent gear out of it, made much more money than I expected, and managed to make Solinda fucking rich. If all things go well for Rabben, we have a pretty loyal place to retreat to, should we need to."

"What was our final... Payment?" Calima asked. "I saw the money in my account, but I am curious what we made in total."

"I was getting to that," I assured her before pulling out my data pad. "We got the full fifteen thousand for stopping the raider and returning most of what they stole that wasn't food. Another twelve for the leftover gear we sold to them, and then another eight for hanging around until their new security forces arrived. Rabben was also kind enough to give us three thousand credits as a bonus for helping them figure out what was going on in the first place. Which reminds me...."

I opened up the business account again, taking the three thousand dollar bonus and spreading it out evenly between everyone before confirming the transfer. Not long after I did, the crew's comms started to go off.

"That's your account, I split the bonus between everyone," I explained, Julius letting out a cheer in response. "That brings us up to fifty-four thousand credits in total, not a bad chunk of credits."

"So what's next?" Julius asked, repeating his earlier question.

"Well, we have a few options," I said, leaning back in my chair. "Miru getting the tri-fighters up and running and then modifying them into the raindrops has massively increased our capabilities."

"It wasn't that hard, Racer helped with the code, and all I did for the conversion was remove some stuff and move other stuff around," She insisted, a hint of a blush on her cheeks. "The only tough part was the charging ports on their mounting."

"Wait, they don't run on fuel?"

"They do, but they can also last about ten minutes without it," She assured me. "By default, they use the fuel first, but I switched it so we don't have to worry about feeling them up as often."

"Right... Well, Miru also wants to add a shield generator to the raindrops, which we would have to purchase," I said. "After seeing how the tri-fighters trivialized driving off the raiders, I think the raindrops are a solid investment. Plus, we can sell the vulture droids to make up part of the cost."

"Won't be able to sell those," Nal responded. "Not legally. CIS droids are illegal to sell."

"... And if we didn't care about it being legal?" I asked.

"I could probably figure it out," Tatnia said. "But it will take a few days, and we will have to go to the right planet. But there are no guarantees anyone will be interested. It's kind of a specialty item.... That said, just selling them to a scrap yard will probably get us four, maybe five thousand?"

"Well... shit. Alright, let's scrap them then. They are taking up space, and I'm hoping to fill it soon."

"With what?" Miru asked.

"To start with? A transport ship of some kind," I answered. "Landing this every time we go to a planet is a waste of money. An armed transport will give us more options, more flexibility, and more firepower."

"Well, we can pick up something like that on any world with enough interplanetary traffic," Tatnia said. "Like I said before, it might be a no-name box with guns, engines, and shields, but you don't need much more than that."

We talked a bit more before settling on a vague plan. We needed to refuel, buy a transport and some shield generators, all while hopefully scrapping the vulture droids to make up some of what we spend. After that, we would head out, looking for more mercenary work.

"Is it worth the hassle to join the bounty hunters guild?" I asked. "You said we weren't likely to get any good bounties if we didn't."

"They have lots of rules," Nal responded. "If you break them, they will come after you. Some of them are... restrictive. Especially if you have morals."

"Yeah, I don't want that," I said, shaking my head.

"Well. Uh. I'm already a low-level member," Julius volunteered, the rest of the crew looking over at him. "Well, technically, I'm not at the moment. But if I paid my dues and the fines for not paying them for so long...."

"... Seriously? You didn't think to bring that up earlier?" I asked, looking at him incredulously. "Like when we were discussing bounties and how we couldn't access any good ones?"

"I wasn't there for that," He said. "Not saying I shouldn't have mentioned it sooner, Boss. But I was helping Miru fix the Arrow when you were going over potential jobs."

I let out a long, defeated sigh before shaking my head and rubbing my face.

"Anyone else has something similar?" I asked when I had recovered enough. "Nobody is secretly royalty from the Hapes Consortium or part of the Chiss Ascendancy? No?"

"What's the Chiss Ascendancy?" Miru asked Nal quietly, who shrugged but looked equally curious.

"Why are you a member?" I asked, ignoring Miru and Nal.

"If money was ever tight, or if Zandev and I had our eye on a big purchase, we would run a few bounties," He explained, a nostalgic smile on his face. "Just local stuff, nothing too exciting, mostly just dragging people who skipped bail back to a jail cell. Being a member cuts the taxes you pay on money from official bounties to a third, so it's worth it."

"Alright, well, that's an option for the future," I said. "Assuming you could be our go-between, handing in bounties. For now, let's figure out what planet we are stopping at to offload the vultures and find a transport."

Racer projected a stellar map, and we discussed the best place to try and offload the vultures, fuel the *Chariot* and let Miru do her shopping. Eventually, we settled on the relatively

nearby world of Daalang, a middling populated world just outside of Hutt Space. Calima set a course, everyone settling in for a four fourteen hour trip. When I spotted Miru immediately heading back to her workshop, I called out to get her attention.

"Miru, take it easy, please," I requested, the young Twi'lek turning to face me. "You've been working hard for the last few days getting the raindrops finished."

"Working on stuff is how I relax, though," She pointed out, seemingly worried I would ban her from her workshop or something.

"Okay, but take it easy, yeah?" I asked. "Non-stop work and stress is bad for you, and it wears you down, which has a tendency to catch up with you at the worst times. So just take it easy, okay?"

"Alright. I'll work on some programming and watch some stuff on the Holonet," She agreed. "What are you doing?"

"Practicing my clairvoyance and-"

"Your... what?" Calima asked, still sitting at the table.

"My... oh, right. We haven't gone over that with you yet...." I said, rubbing my forehead. "So-

"He's a space wizard!" Miru shouted, cutting off Nal and Tatnia, probably from saying the same thing.

"He's... a what?"

"A space wizard!"

"... Come with me, Calima, I can show you down in the cargo bay," I said with a long sigh. "Would have been nice to ease you into it, but no helping it now."

Still looking confused, Calima stood up slowly, following down to the cargo bay.

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By now, I was an old hand at explaining how my magic worked, what it was, and what kind of stuff I could do. So far, everyone accepted the explanation that it was something from my homeworld, or at least one of those strange mysteries you sometimes hear about when traveling around the galaxy. After a fifteen-minute show for Calima, she went back upstairs, looking a little shell-shocked but not enough to consider leaving us or anything that drastic.

Over the next four hours, I worked on my clairvoyance more, stretching it out as much as I could. About two hours in, I finally achieved one of the first levels of clairvoyance mastery, or at least expertise, the ability to locate objects similar to one you had already identified. Its range was small, I could barely locate a second bolt on the other side of the ship while holding an almost exact copy in my hand, but that was already useful. Or rather, I'm sure it would be, especially as the range had already expanded past the length of the ship by the end of the third hour. This was just the first step in mastering the clairvoyance spell with the next stage, the one I was really looking to learn, finding objects I had seen in detailed images, sketches, or magical reproductions. Once I could do that, I would probably stop spending so much time with the locating spell, as I really didn't care about the even further higher levels of mastery.

When we finally landed on Daalang, I negotiated with the owner of the landing pad to supply us with fuel, which he promised would arrive by the end of the day. We didn't technically need a refill, at least according to Calima, but I would prefer to keep the reactors topped off. Miru and Nal managed to find a scrap yard that would buy the two intact vultures for five thousand credits each, not bad considering how little I originally "paid" for them. At the prompting of Miru, we also negotiated with the yard owner for two used shield generator units in exchange. He eagerly agreed, and after trading a few pictures back and forth, Miru agreed the ones we settled on were good quality. In the end, a hauler came by about four hours after we agreed to the deal, dropping off two higher-end starfighter shield generators and taking the vultures, as well as two thousand extra credits.

"These are perfect Boss, they should fit nicely in the raindrops," Miru said as the labor bots, directed by Racer, carried the units onto the cargo lift. "I'm gonna add in some of the spare vulture power cells as well to help keep the shields running without affecting the speed or how long it can run without using fuel."

"That's not gonna slow it down?" I asked as she stepped onto the cargo lift with the droids and parts.

"Nope, on top of the rocket mounts and the dorsal wing, I also removed some of its paneling since it was just going to be covered by *more* paneling," She explained. "With all the changes done, it should be just about the same weight, maybe just a tad heavier."

I let the young mechanic go, she was clearly eager to get started prepping everything for the final modifications to the raindrops. She hadn't expected to get the shields this quickly, but she was thankful I was still prioritizing what she wanted.

It was hard not to after seeing what the tri-fighters had done on Itander.

By the time everything was loaded and offloaded, and our fuel was delivered, it was already starting to get late. I spent the downtime looking through the inventories of several ship brokers, trying to find the best fit for what we were looking for. I quickly found that Tatnia had

been nearly a hundred percent correct, most of what I found in our price range and our required size were no name boxes with very little originality.

"How did you know there would be so many like this?" I asked him, tilting my data pad toward her.

"Because hundreds of planets and species make their own shuttles," She explained with a shrug. "There's no hyperdrive and no reason for showing off when your only goal is to go from planetside to a waiting ship."

"Right. Sounds like I should definitely bring one of you guys to tell me if it's junk or not...."

I eventually found two locations not far from us, each one having a couple of shuttles that would fit what we were looking for. Unfortunately, with how late it had gotten, I decided that going out to find it could wait until the following day.

When Tatnia and I finally did get up and head out early the following day, we ended up taking a taxi in the hope that we would find a shuttle that we liked and would fly it back to the landing pad. We arrived at the first shipyard but immediately realized that there was nothing we were interested in. The two shuttles that had caught my eye were much older than the images let on, having been sitting in the lot for years. There was significant corrosion in their engines caused by the high PH level storms that occasionally plagued the rainy season on Daalang. The salesperson tried to get us to buy a new model that had just come in, one that more or less matched what we needed but that he was asking way too much for. We left frustrated but hopeful that the next place would have what we were looking for.

When we arrived at the second location, we were immediately more hopeful about the quality of the vehicles, as the salesperson had to actually pull a tarp off them with the help of a hovering droid. We had just stepped into the back end of the second shuttle when my comm suddenly lit up.

"Boss! Come in!" Miru shouted frantically through the device. "C'mon, c'mon!"

"Miru? What is it?" I asked, as I pulled my comm out and brought it up to my mouth. "What-"

"Racer just detected a massive alert over the police frequency," She said, cutting me off. "The entire city quarters security force just got orders to head directly for you, with orders to capture two dangerous criminals matching your descriptions!"