

As planned, we flew for about fifteen minutes before Miru and Tatnia landed in an empty alleyway deep in one of the city sectors. The moment we landed beside them, Miru all but ran into the cargo space of the A-A5 and grabbed her tools before descending on the speeders. She inspected every corner and spot she could think of, looking for trackers or any other issues, spending a half hour before she was finally satisfied.

The rest of us nervously kept watch while she worked, waiting for the enforcers or whoever to come screaming down at us.

When she declared them clean, we immediately headed off again, this time flying in a different direction than before, heading to the people Tatnia had found to sell the speeders to. This time, it was a much faster process, a quick exchange of four thousand credits, and the speeders were dragged into a garage, a small crew of people tearing into them immediately, pulling off valuable parts. Seems like Tatnia had found a chop shop.

With three thousand dollars added to the new ship fund, and 250 credits added to each of our pockets, we climbed back into our speeders and flew away, eager to put as much distance as possible between us and this entire area. All of us were slowly coming down off our adrenaline high, to varying levels of disbelief that we had done it again and managed to pull it off perfectly.

"We need to be careful," Tatnia said. "This was luck. That went way too well, and it makes me karking nervous!"

She was pacing in the back of the cargo space, while Miru seemed to be digesting the situation by sitting in the copilot's seat on autopilot, most of her thoughts clearly focused inward. I reached over and gave her shoulder a squeeze, causing her to look over at me. I gave her a supportive smile, and after a moment, she smiled back, leaning back in her seat. She let out a long breath, the tension that had been running through her slowly fading.

"Thanks," She said quietly. "That was... more than I expected."

"I can imagine," I said, ignoring Tatnia as she muttered and talked to herself in the cargo space. "I won't belittle you by saying you're too young for this kind of stuff, because, at some point, you kinda stop being young going through the kind of stuff you have. But I will say if you ever feel like something is too much, that you-"

"I can-!" She started to say, clearly upset at the accusation that she couldn't handle herself.

"I have no doubt in my mind that you can handle anything this galaxy could throw at you," I said seriously and honestly. "But that doesn't mean you should. Don't be afraid of speaking up because no one would think lesser of you."

For a moment, she looked like she was going to try and refute what I said. After a long pause, she huffed and blew out another aggressive breath. At that moment, she reminded me of one of my younger cousins, eager to prove she could do anything. It made me want to wrap her in bubble wrap and lock her in the cargo space for her own good.

"Thanks," she said, even quieter than before.

I simply nodded, focusing on piloting for a while.

Eventually, after a few hours in the air, Nal spoke through the comms, once again scaring the crap out of everyone.

"I found a spot to land in. An abandoned landing pad, too small for a ship," He said. "I've already landed."

"Alright, I'll find you," I said before using clairvoyance to home in on his location.

Before long, I landed the truck speeder on the same landing pad as his. It was a bit rough of a landing, but Miru only gave me a single, quick look of annoyance, so I considered it a win. We stepped out of the speeder and examined our surroundings from the ground. The landing pad looked like someone's private space, but it was clearly in disrepair and was cut off on all four sides, with no way in or out. The walls were also pretty high up, hiding us from casual, street-level eyes.

"What is this?" I asked as I looked around.

"Sign of poor city planning," Nal pointed out, Tatnia nodding in agreement.

"It was probably a private speeder pad, but the building it connected to was demolished," Tatnia guessed with a shrug. "It happens when you build a city like this, layer after layer, shoving in as much as you can."

"Huh... this might be a good spot to hunker down in for a few days," I suggested, still looking around. "We could cover the speeders with tarps to make them even less obvious, let the heat die down for a while. We have plenty of food. All we would need is water..."

"I was going to suggest something similar," Nal said, standing from where he was leaning on the speeder bike.

Over the next twenty minutes, we covered the two speeders in tarps, weighing them down and ensuring that the two vehicles' blocky angles were as obscured as possible. When we were done, we all climbed into the cargo space of the A-A5 to have dinner.

The night passed without issue, as did the next three days, though we all reacted differently to the sudden free time. I was alright for the first two, using the time to learn all the remaining novice spells, practicing them almost constantly once I understood them. I only became agitated when learning and memorizing all of the spells did not unlock anything new in the grimoire.

When just learning them didn't do anything, I spent a lot of time committing the spells to memory and getting used to casting them, only for the grimoire to remain unchanged. The only spell I couldn't really fully cast was elemental flare. I cast it once after learning it, the spell exploding against one of the landing pad's walls, and immediately got yelled at by Tatnia for trying to give away our hiding spot.

Miru handled the free time fine, spending the first two days painting the A-A5 and MVR-3 using equipment that Nal went out to buy. She painted the MVR-4 a deep maroon, with bands of white running down the edges, and the A-A5 white, with gray-blue highlights, including a large strip running down each side. She then spent the last day scuffing and dirtying the new paint, making it seem weathered and old enough that no one would try and steal them. She was bored but kept herself busy enough.

Tatnia handled the downtime the worst, almost immediately getting antsy and agitated. She mostly spent the time cleaning and tuning our blaster pistols and rifles.

Nal was the only one who had no problems at all being cooped up in the closed-off landing pad, seeming content to read from his datapad and sleep in.

Still, on the fourth morning, we decided that enough was enough, and it was time to get down to business.

"I'm as worried as everyone about stirring up too much trouble," Tatnia said, taking a sip from a container of water, a breakfast bag in her lap. "But I think this is enough of just sitting around. If we don't do something, I'm going to go insane."

"Alright, I guess we have been here long enough," I admitted. "I'm starting to feel it as well."

"I suggest we find a target somewhere else, so we may return here," Nal said, looking around the secluded spot. "This location is well suited to staying hidden. For a few excursions at least."

"It could be worse," Miru commented. "That last alley we stayed in smelled... bad."

"This whole planet smells bad," I said, shaking my head. "But that's not a bad idea. Coming back here a few times is fine, but eventually, it's best to move on to somewhere else."

Everyone nodded in agreement before we began discussing our next target, starting with what we would aim for.

“I’m not sure the transport raid was really worth it,” Tatnia said with a wince. “It got a lot of attention since we did it in broad daylight, but we hardly made any money.”

The planetary news, which was 90% funded by the Hutts that controlled the entire system, had run the story for a few days, emphasizing that the men killed were innocent hard working people, never mentioning that they were transporting slaves. Still, by the second day the news had died down, and we weren't even mentioned on the third.

“And you think the solution is to go bigger?” I asked, looking skeptical.

“By going bigger, we need fewer jobs,” Nal explained, Tatnia pointing at the red-eyed Duros and nodding in agreement. “Though they draw more ire, it will mean we can leave sooner before the full wrath crushes us.”

“Big targets mean big stakes,” I pointed out, leaning back on the cargo space bench. “But I’m ready to go after something bigger as long as we can set up a solid plan. Does anyone have any ideas?”

“Money transfer.” Tatnia immediately volunteered. “They have to take physical credits to a bank somehow at some point. All businesses do.”

The way credits worked was one of the reasons I was very happy to have negotiated for my extra knowledge before the entities dropped me here. The stories and movies had always just called them credits, only differentiating them in terms of who made them, meaning Old Republic, Imperial, or New Republic. They made some appearances in the movies and TV shows, but there was never much detail about the system in place, at least as far as I knew.

In reality, this one at least, there were three forms of credits. The first was digital, which was essentially what you had in your bank, whether it was local or Imperial backed. It was all through the holonet, though, ones and zeroes that never really existed but could still be spent and transferred around.

The second was credit ingots, which came in the form of literal ingots or coins. There was a surprising amount of variety for credit ingots, with dozens and dozens of shapes, styles, and denominations. The final form was the credit chip. These held internal values ranging from hundreds to thousands, even tens and hundreds of thousands. However, it was considered foolish to put that many credits into something that could be easily stolen. You could swipe a credit chip for small charges, similar to a gift card, or hand it in for its total value. Once they reached zero, they would automatically junk themselves, but Imperial-backed banks often offered incentives for handing in your zeroed chips.

It could get confusing transferring around chips and ingots, but most people never had to worry about that because they usually only had small amounts of physical credits, their larger amounts being transferred around through digital means. Only criminals or people who didn't trust the system accumulated large quantities of high-value chips or ingots.

All of this was backed by the Galactic Empire, so no one was dumb enough to mess with it. Rumors existed of cities being flattened by orbital bombardment because they were leaking counterfeit ingots or hacked credit chips. Not even the Hutts were dumb or greedy enough to test that rumor, not when the Empire seemed content to ignore them for now.

We discussed the idea of hitting a credit transfer and eventually settled on observing another market far from our current location. Chances are they would be doing the transfer themselves, which meant the transport would be easy to identify because it would be heavily guarded.

"How heavily guarded are we talking about?" I asked, leaning forward. "The element of surprise will be on our side, but that can only do so much."

"It will likely be in an armored speeder, probably a modified somehow," Tatnia explained with a shrug. "And probably at least one escort. Something tough enough to fight off attacks."

We discussed it some more and devised a simple but relatively well-thought-out plan. We would find a market that was a decent distance from the nearest bank, then observe it, similar to how we started our last raid. When we thought we spotted the credit transfer convoy, because it would almost definitely be a convoy of at least two speeders, we would notify the rest of the group and follow. If it looked too tough we would pull back and move on to another location. If we decided we could handle it, I would study the speeders from our observation point and then use clairvoyance to follow them. When they reached a location that we thought would work, Nal, piloting the MVR-3, would zip ahead and attack them from the front while we would attack them from behind, hopefully taking out the convoys.

After disabling the armored vehicle we would land, Miru would break into the armored transport and we would take everything we could gather before booking it. We would take a long, roundabout route back to this spot, where we would lay low for another few days.

We talked about the plan for a while, spinning alternate ideas and emergency additions, where we would go if we were compromised, and what we would do if we were separated. Eventually, it was time to stop talking and start doing, so we packed everything up and headed out, traveling for four hours to find a slave market that was as far away as possible.

It didn't take long after we started watching this new market to realize that we clearly had no idea what we were really doing. The plan after the observation was more or less solid, as long as we didn't bite off more than we could chew. What wouldn't work was our idea to just wait for a credit transfer, with no idea where it would come from and what it would look like beyond armored and probably armed and protected by an escort.

After spending four hours watching the market, I called it off, and we flew back to the closed-off landing pad. After we landed, Nal climbed into the storage space of the A-A5 so we could all talk.

"That was embarrassing," Tatnia said, shaking her head. "Why did we think it would be that easy? They might be scum for selling slaves, but they aren't stupid."

"I don't know," I said, shaking my head. "I guess everything else had just been going our way, so we assumed it would continue that way? Either way... we are going to need another idea. We could go back to stealing their ships?"

"I think I have an idea," Miru said, chewing her lip. "But I don't know if you guys are going to like it or not."

"All we can say is no," Nal pointed out, while I nodded encouragingly. "I do not think any of us would mock you. Especially not after what just happened."

"Well... the issue is finding the money transfer, right? Tracking it down and figuring out which one it is, right?" She asked, waiting for everyone to nod in confirmation. "Well...Boss, you have a way to track stuff, right?"

"Yeah, but at my skill level, I need to know the object or have been to the location before," I explained. Eventually, that will be a bit more flexible, but not any time soon."

"Well, what if we took some credit ingots and modified them somehow?" She asked. "A dent here, a marking there, maybe an identifiable scratch or something. Would that be enough for you to find them specifically?"

I thought to myself for a moment, considering what she asked. After a moment, I nodded.

"I think so, especially if I have an image of the ingots saved on a datapad or something to help me remember what they looked like. But how does that help us?"

"Well, if the ingots look mostly normal, and they ended up being spent somewhere," She explained with an apprehensive wince. "They would most likely get stored with other ingots, which would eventually get transported out...."

"You're suggesting that we spend money at a slave market? Are you suggesting-"

"Mhmm! We need to buy a slave."