

# Chapter 7

We waited another minute, my mana filling entirely by the time the gate finally started to shift and rumble, slowly sliding open. On the other side was the speeder, which slowly pulled out of the hanger bay and into the open space. On the other side of the gate, I could see a few people walking around, with a single person, the Gran, by the gate, ready to close it after the speeder was through.

My tiger summon ran forward with a mental command through the connected spell, crossing the gap in a few seconds. It leaped into the air and took down the first goon, knocking him away from the gate control panel and wrapping its jaws around their neck. Purple blood sprayed out as it bit down, a strangled scream getting everyone's attention.

From the corner of my eye, I saw Nal step out of the doorway, blaster pistol already out, aiming at the front of the speeder, before turning to focus on my job. Shouting echoed from the hangar bay as the other slavers spotted their friend getting munched on and torn to pieces. They obviously were confused, as from their perspective, it looked like a hologram of a creature was killing their friend. When Nal opened fire on the speeder behind us, they suddenly understood something was happening.

With the gate controller dead, I sent the tiger in to attack the next closest slaver, the ethereal feline racing toward the Weequay. By now, blasters were out and trained on the summoned animal, and a half dozen blasts of red energy shot out to intercept the tiger, immediately followed up by a half dozen more. Their aim was terrible, but two shots hit the summon, and the spell collapsed into itself, disappearing in a gush of harmless energy.

Its purpose was served, however, because while everyone was focused on the tiger, no one noticed Tatnia and me stepping in, pulling our weapons out, and opening fire.

Tatnia's aim was near perfect, the blast of red energy slapping into her nearest target and dropping them, their neck burnt from the blaster bolt. Her next shot wasn't nearly as accurate but still impacted her target's chest, sending them to the ground and letting her finish them off with a second and third shot.

My own shooting wasn't nearly impressive, but it was still generally effective. My first two shots took down a nearby [Rodian](#), one in the shoulder and one in the hip. I made a note to double-check he was dead before stepping further into the hangar, aiming and firing at my next target, a human who was already turning towards us.

By now, all focus was shifting, and they began returning fire in a rapid spray of scarlet energy. It crossed the hangar space from the three remaining slavers standing. One of them began backing up the access ramp into the ship, trying to get inside.

As laser fire came towards both of us, Tatnia and I dove for cover behind a pair of recharge stations and access terminals, both of them sparking under the impact of more laser fire. I quickly charged up another conjure familiar and aimed it as far away as I could, just about two-thirds of the way between me and the remaining goons. My tiger suddenly appeared and immediately ran forward, drawing attention and fire away from us. Both Tatnia and I leaned out from cover and fired around my conjured familiar, both of us managing to take down another target.

The laser fire stopped as my tiger pounced on the final goon, taking him down and finishing them off with a single vicious bite. A second later, it faded away, having already run out of magic. By then, Tatnia and I were already rushing under the ship, wanting to get on board as fast as possible in case anyone tried to take off. We climbed the gangway quickly, peeking over the edge before climbing inside.

We both tore through the ship, finding and taking down two more goons when we pushed into a break room. I also had a fully charged tiger following me around, jumping into each room we entered so we wouldn't get ambushed. When we eventually reached the cockpit, Tatnia sat down and immediately started flicking and pushing buttons, finally nodding and looking back around at me.

"Scanners say there isn't anyone else on board. Looks like we got them all," She said, looking back down at the control panels. "Take off will take about ten minutes. No way I'm taking off in this scrap pile without running a full preflight check."

"Are we going to be dealing with Enforcers?" I asked, looking out at the hangar through the cockpit window.

"Did you call them?" Tatnia asked. "Cause these guys sure as hell didn't. We will be fine. Just keep an eye out."

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Nal was already long gone when I exited the ship, following the plan to meet us at the junkyard after releasing the would-be slaves somewhere relatively safe. I quickly started going through each of the slaver corpses, grabbing credits, blasters, power packs, and anything else worthwhile, though I wasn't nearly as thorough as I had been before, as time was short and we needed to hurry.

As I worked, I had my tiger summon drag out the corpses of the slavers from inside before dumping our loot off in the same break room we had caught two of the crew inside the ship. I pocketed the credits, which were worth less than a thousand, before feeling the whole ship tremble slightly, the power shifting as we took off. I made my way back up to the cockpit, watching the view quickly change as we lifted from the hangar and into the sky.

"Everything going well?" I asked, looking around at the hundreds of buttons, nobs, switches, and levers that ultimately meant very little to me.

"This thing should have been sent to a junkyard ages ago," She responded with a scowl. "Half of the internal sensors are busted, and the other half are reading out warnings."

"Are we going to have issues?"

"No, I can get us there."

"Good. I'm going to start clearing out the cabins and the storage. I want to know about anything we can charge extra for."

Tatnia nodded, and after a few seconds, I patted the back of her chair and left, heading back. The plan was for us to head to space for a few hours, giving Nal enough time to fly the speeder to the junkyard and giving us time to comb through the ship.

I started by heading to the cargo bays, which took me a few minutes to find. The larger bay was clearly modified to transport slaves, with all access and control panels blocked off or removed and chain mounts attached to the wall. The other was filled with supplies and other stuff, including a worn and laser-scored [speeder bike](#). It was also clearly modified with a decent-sized cargo module securely attached to the front. Still, it seemed to be in workable condition. It was also armed with two small laser cannons, spread out just wide enough to shoot around the storage module.

When Tania was finished piloting the ship into a decent place to wait, she made her way back to the cargo bay, having walked through the slave room. She looked disgusted, shaking her head.

"Nal got in contact," She said while peeking under the lid of a container. "He took everyone to a cheap spaceport and is now on his way. He's about an hour and a half out from the junkyard... Says he has a tag-along. A mechanic with nothing to go back to."

I was nodding along, primarily focused on opening the cargo pod in front of me, until she mentioned the last bit. When she did, I turned to look at her in surprise.

"Really? Well, we will need that, but let's hope they are up for getting their hands dirty too. Did he say anything else?"

When she shook her head, we started going through the cargo together. She tested the speeder bike, which started up immediately, to my surprise. She estimated that it would probably be able to carry about double its standard capacity with the modifications. Since it had a decent amount of storage and was functional, we ended up storing everything we wanted to take off the ship inside it.

Once we were done going through the cargo bay, which had a decent amount of food and spare parts, we started going through the crew quarters. We found a few hidden credit stashes, totaling about four thousand credits, most of which came from the captain's quarters. We also found a few data pads worth taking, a couple of med packs of varying grades that we eagerly took, a bunch of energy packs, and a lot of junk that wasn't worth its weight. We put what was worth taking into the speeder, along with all of the blasters that I had looted. We each took two hundred credits for ourselves, including what I had taken from the corpses, and I held onto Nal's cut for now. I also grabbed ten binders from their storage, as well as the control rod linked to them. They could come in handy, and it was better to have and not need than need and not have.

We ended up filling all of the extra space left over in the speeder bike with two weeks' worth of sealed and stable food from the cargo bay. We were double-checking everything when Nal messaged us on our comms units, telling us that they were just arriving at the junkyard and were about to head into the main shop.

Tatnia and I both returned to the cockpit, and I watched her pilot the ship back down into the atmosphere. The ship rattled and shook several times, causing Tatnia to curse, but we eventually made it. She was in contact with some sort of government faction most of the way, which asked for her landing vector and location, which she happily answered. There were no questions about identification numbers or anything like that, which was unsurprising considering where we were.

We landed rather roughly in a cramped scrapyard, one that was several times larger than the entire hangar complex we had just come from. As we did, we could see Nal, a pink Twi'lek female, and an older human male waiting by what was probably the office for the scrapyard. Tatnia shut everything down and let out a long breath, calming herself before looking at me.

"I hate piloting," She said, with heavy emphasis. "Especially without a co-pilot. Don't make me do it more than I need to."

"Ah... Sorry. I never had the opportunity to learn," I explained, rubbing the back of my head. "Does Nal know how to fly?"

"He said he could. Any mechanic worth anything should be able to as well."

We headed off the ship, which was clicking and ticking as it cooled down from its short trip. Nal and the Twi'lek female were waiting for us at the bottom of the ramp.

"Good to see you. And unharmed as well. This is Miru. She wanted to stick around," Nal said, gesturing to the woman beside him.

I reached out my hand, which she took confidently. I could already tell she was on the younger side, maybe even younger than eighteen. I hated to involve someone so young in something like this, but I would at least hear her story first.

"Nice to meet you, Miru, my name's Deacon, this is Tatnia, and I'm sure Nal's introduced himself already," I said, shaking her hand once before letting go. "He mentioned you're a mechanic? We don't really have the resources to have someone on board who isn't an active participant just yet...."

"I can handle a blaster just fine," She said, just the barest hint of an accent coming through as she talked. "I am better at fixing things than breaking them, but I would never say no to killing slavers."

"And Nal explained that this isn't a charity group?" Tatnia asked, cutting me off from asking a similar question. "That this isn't about saving all the slaves?"

"He did, and I agree. I am all for helping out, but I'm not ready to fight the entirety of Hutt space."

We talked a bit more, Miru explaining that she was actually a second-generation slave. When she was younger, she had already been freed once, only to return to Ryloth with her parents to get snatched up again. Her parents did nothing to stop it, so she had no interest in returning to them. It was a horrible story to hear, but she handled it well. That or she was jaded as hell and would likely crack later.

"I would have been out in a few months," She assured us as we waited for the owner of the junkyard to examine the slaver ship. "I already know how to disable a slave chip, and as skilled as I am, I would have been put to work in a shop, not sent to shake my ass on a stage."

It took a bit for me to realize it, but she spoke with a faint French accent, which threw me for a loop. At first, I wondered if she was sent here by entities as well, but after several not-so-subtle references to Earth pop culture, I was pretty sure that wasn't the case. I asked Tatnia later, and apparently, that was the typical Twi'lek accent.

About an hour after we landed, the older human owner of the yard came out of the ship and offered us fifteen thousand credits for both the transport speeder and the ship, which made both Nal and Miru laugh while Tatnia just scowled.

"The material scrap alone is worth that much," Miru said, shaking her head. "Even if only half of the ship was working, it's worth twice that."

"Maybe, but we all know you're not going to get that much for it," He responded with a shrug. "But I suppose that is a little low. Twenty thousand."

We negotiated for a while, by which I mean Tatnia and Miru negotiated, and Nal and I watched. Eventually, Miru pulled me aside while Tatnia kept it up.

"Boss, we need transportation, right?" She asked, and I nodded in confirmation. "Maybe something big enough to live out of? Something we can travel around the planet with?"

"Yeah, that would be good, at least until we save enough to buy a halfway decent ship," I responded. "And boss? Really?"

"I was looking around earlier while we were waiting. He has an [A-A5 speeder](#) in the back, with some serious aftermarket modifications that I don't think he realizes are there," She explained, now talking softly and leading me away. "It's missing some parts, but it looked mostly intact. It could function as a mobile base...."

She led me around the junkyard to a large chunky speeder. It was painted gray with a blue highlight running down the side. The interior was spacious, and she assured me that the engines and repulsorlift were already beefed up to a full flight model, a costly modification. Its energy systems were also improved to handle the addition. She also pointed out that these speeder trucks were known for their reliability and power. Even better was that its laser turret emplacement was still in place, almost entirely untouched.

"Give me Six hours and three thousand credits, and I could turn this thing into a mobile base for us," She explained confidently. "With the improvements already done to its thrusters and energy system, plus the cannon on top... it's got some serious problem-solving ability."

I spent a few more minutes inspecting the vehicle with her and agreed that despite being dusty and clearly heavily used, the equipment and internals seemed to be in excellent shape. Miru explained that baseline, in the state that it was, the speeder was worth around five thousand credits. But with the aftermarket energy and thruster upgrades, it was worth seven or eight thousand. When she got it working and replaced a few parts, it would be worth even more.

"Alright. Consider this your audition," I said eventually, focusing on the younger Twi'lek. "You get this thing working, and you're part of the team."

"Alright, Boss, I'll start looking for some of the missing parts," She said with a serious nod before heading for a nearby vehicle.

I returned to the rest of the group, Tatnia managing to get the owner to twenty-six thousand credits. I put my hand on Tatnia's shoulder, and she stopped, looking at me with a raised eyebrow.

"What about twenty-one thousand credits, the A-A5 Speeder you have in back, and the few parts to get it running again?" I offered, getting a harsh look from Tatnia.

"That vehicle is likely worth five thousand credits," The owner pointed out.

"I know, which means it adds up pretty well to the offer you just made," I countered. "I think we both know this is a pretty fair offer."

He hemmed and hawed for a few minutes before finally agreeing, shaking my hand, and returning to his office to get us the money. Tatnia turned to face me, her hands on her hips. She clearly wasn't happy that I had butt into her negotiation.

"Miru said it's worth the money, and she says she can get it running quickly," I explained, trying to head off her frustration.

"And you just believe her?"

"It checks all the boxes for what we need and gives her a chance to prove herself," I explained with a shrug. "If she fucks it up, we give her the boot and take it to a repair shop. It's an armed speeder with enough room for all of us, something we desperately need. We are set for transport between it and the speeder bike, at least until we get a space-worthy ship."

After thinking for a moment, she nodded, accepting that we needed a transport like that, and if what Miru was saying was true, it had been a pretty good deal.