

About two hours into watching Miru work on the speeder, Tatnia was no longer complaining about her joining the team, beyond just not knowing her. It was abundantly clear that the young Twi'lek was an extremely skilled mechanic. She all but flew around the yard, pulling pieces out of other speeders, cleaning up parts, and modifying a few of them before installing them into the A-A5. She also pulled a few pieces out of the A-A5 and worked them over, even trading a few of them out.

Of course, we weren't sitting idle while she worked. Tatnia helped out where she could, as she knew some basic speeder maintenance, while I was stuck cleaning since I knew absolutely nothing. A quick check of the cockpit, and I knew I could pilot the speeder with minimal trial and error, but beyond being able to tell when something was clearly burnt out or cracked, I was useless for repair.

Scraping gunk from the repulsorlifts wasn't exactly glamorous, but someone had to do it. I also wasn't going to try convincing my new friends to let me sit on my ass and relax while they worked hard.

While we worked on getting the speeder truck up and running, Nal was off with the speeder bike doing some shopping. We had taken the stuff we planned on keeping out of the speeder bike storage module, including the food and a [blaster pistol](#) for Miru. The rest Nal would sell. I also handed him two thousand credits we got from selling the ship, the money we looted from the ship, and the slavers themselves, totaling about seven thousand credits.

"We need four blaster rifles, at least one capable of longer range, ammo packs for them, and some spares for our pistols. We also need two collapsible beds, a decent tool kit for Miru, some basic combat gear if you can find some, and anything you see that you think we need," I explained, the blue alien nodding in agreement. "Oh, two hundred of those credits are yours from the raid. Tatnia and I already took ours. You should probably check with the other two to see if they need anything."

He left shortly after that, a list saved on his newly claimed and wiped datapad.

The owner of the junkyard kept an eye on us as we continued to work on the speeder truck, speaking up more than once about what parts Miru was taking. Apparently, the ambitious young Twi'lek kept trying to use parts that were technically upgraded to what the A-A5 would actually have. I had her put most of them back, but a few she explained would be worth the extra money, so we paid half price for them.

Four hours after he left, Nal returned. By then, I had finished wiping down the interior of the speeder and had started using a sonic scrubber to wash the grime off of the exterior. We

didn't want it looking new, as that's how you got things stolen, but some of the grime build-ups were actually bad for the heat sinks that kept the repulsorlifts cool.

The Duros pulled back into the junkyard with the speeder bike slightly overloaded, extra containers strapped to the custom storage module. He quickly hopped off the speeder and waved me over, and together we offloaded everything he had bought.

He bought three [blaster rifles](#), which he assured me were basic models that would serve us well but weren't anything to comm home about. What he was excited about was the [proton rifle](#) he managed to find, a long-ranged, high-powered weapon that was usually worth around three thousand credits but that he got for just under two thousand.

He managed to get his hands on some decent [armor](#), which was just a basic plate system we would wear over our regular clothes. It was just the torso armor, but that was a whole lot better than nothing. He also got [helmets](#), which looked like a different model version of the helmet Leia and Luke wore during the Battle of Endor. Hopefully, they would keep anyone from being instakilled.

The rest of his shopping was basic, primarily supplies and the beds I requested. The A-A2 had two collapsable bunks that would deploy from the back benches, so with these two additional beds, we wouldn't need to spend money on hotel rooms. Which was good because it was one less way for us to be tracked as we went around the planet liberating slaver money.

Nal also bought a portable sonic shower, which I thanked him profusely for, as I hadn't even thought of that. He just chuckled and patted my shoulder. When we were done unloading the speeder bike, Nal started helping with the repairs, and I went back to cleaning.

After just over five hours, Miru slid down the slanted front end of the speeder truck, dropping down to the ground before dusting off her hands.

"That's all I can really do here, even with the extra tools you got me. Thanks for that, by the way," She said with a confident grin. "I fixed all the major issues, replaced all the parts that had been taken out, caught a few issues that would have popped up after a few weeks of running and managed to snag some upgrades. It isn't going to be able to take on a hover tank, but she's a fair fight with any civilian speeder you throw it against."

"Not bad, Miru. I think I speak for all of us when I say welcome to the team," I said, smiling and offering my hand, which she shook with a cocky grin. "It will be good to have someone on board who can maintain our stuff."

"Easy, I'll keep everything up and running," She assured me, shaking Nal's and Tatnia's hands next. "So... now that I'm part of the team... what's the end goal?"

“Well... for now the goal is to keep stealing from slavers until we have enough to buy a halfway decent ship,” I explained, the pink-skinned Twi'lek's eyes widening at the mention of a ship. “Beyond that... well, I think making a mercenary company was on the table, but I'm down for generalized adventurers as well.”

“Adventurers?” Tatnia asked. “What does that mean?”

“Sounds intriguing, but yes, what is it?” Nal asked as well.

“Adventurers are... huh, it's hard to explain without cultural touchstones from home,” I admitted, thinking to myself before continuing. “Adventurers are professional trouble magnets. We travel the galaxy, looking for anything interesting. Following mysterious rumors, scavenging old battlegrounds and ruins, taking bounties, hunting dangerous animals to harvest and sell.”

“That... sounds an awful lot like mercenaries,” Miru pointed out.

“Yeah, probably,” I responded with a shrug. “But it's more proactive. Instead of advertising and being hired, an adventurer would go out and find things to do.”

We talked about it for a while, and I somehow managed to resist making a knee joke the entire time. Eventually, Nal cut us off, shaking his head.

“We have gotten distracted,” He said before turning slightly to gesture to the A-A5 speeder truck. “Should we not focus?”

“Right! You need to start her up, Boss,” Miru said, handing me the activation chip for the speeder. “See if I did a good job.”

“Really? You realize I was here the whole time, right? While you were testing it over and over again?” I asked, still taking the chip. “And still with the boss thing?”

I tapped the closer side door with the chip key, the door clicking inwards slightly before sliding open with a strained whirring. I climbed inside to see everything Nal had bought set up inside, including the laser rifles stacked in a handy weapon rack along the back. Nal, Miru, and Tatnia followed me inside, with Miru following me into the cockpit and dropping into the co-pilot's seat. It took me a second to find the slot, but eventually, I slid the activation chip into the console. A low thrum reverberates through the vehicle, the lights and buttons coming on immediately. Seconds after them, the front panels lit up, each of them going through a boot-up sequence before displaying their information.

The repulsors lifted the truck off the ground, kicking in after the boot-up sequences finished. Everything was working well as far as I could tell, and after taking a look at Miru, I could see she agreed.

“Alright... let's pack everything up and get the hell out of here,” I said with a smile. “The quicker we can put some distance between here and us, the better.”

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It took us a few minutes to pack everything up and leave, with Tatnia driving the speeder bike and the rest of us inside the A-A5. We stayed on the ground for now since the speeder bike couldn't fly with us if we took to the sky. Nal and Miru were in the cockpit, the door opened so we could all talk. I was sitting on one of the speeder's benches, grimoire in my lap as I practiced the healing spell. I was primarily focused on the book, reading the introduction to the lesser ward spell, trying my best to ingrain the healing spell into my head so I could do it without thinking.

I was already noticing that the spell was coming to me easier than before, which was good. Healing was the spell I had been using the most, actively practicing it instead of only using it when I was fighting. I shook my head and refocused on the reading, restarting the sentence to make sure I didn't miss anything.

Eventually, I turned the page of the grimoire, cutting off the healing spell and then activating it again in the opposite hand. The next page contained two detailed diagrams of the same spell matrix from two different angles, with notes pointing to several points. I frowned, unconsciously tilting my head as I tried to make heads or tails of the matrix.

After a few minutes of studying the diagrams, I let the healing spell fade, feeling my mana slowly begin to recharge. I was steadily getting used to the feeling of being drained of energy, the hollow feeling getting more tolerable, especially after having drained it completely more times than I could count at this point. When my magicka had returned, I closed my eyes and focused on the matrix, using the same imagery I always used to pull, twist and draw the energy out, slowly forging it into shape.

After about fifteen minutes of working out the spell matrix and consulting the diagram a few dozen times, I was relatively sure I got it into the proper dimension and shape. The matrix was interesting, similar in some small ways to the healing spell, which I found bizarre, but it also had a vastly different execution.

With the matrix set up, I once again started the tuning process. The first chunk required minimal turning, my mana flowing through easily. After that, my progress slowed, meticulously adjusting the matrix as I made my way through the rest of the spell, spending a bit over two more hours tuning and aligning the rest of the spell matrix to myself. I finally got the spell to work, the surprise of feeling the magic finally push through and cast, shocking me enough to drop the spell before the ward could even fully form.

I reformed the adjusted spell quickly, this time standing to cast, my hand held out before pushing my mana through.

Mana spun through the matrix and shifted form, a wall of projected energy forming in front of me, radiating from a central core of energy that floated in front of my palm. There was a shimmering flash that slightly reduced visibility through the mostly see-through center of the spell, while the outer rim of the protective energy shield glowed with a very pale blue. I would have no idea how strong it was until I had a chance to test it, but the spell itself seemed to work. Now I-

“WHAT THE KRIF!”

The young Twi'lek was standing in the cockpit doorway, her eyes wide and her jaw hanging open as she stared at me. Her sudden shout of surprise had scared me enough that the spell failed. The protective barrier fluttered and collapsed as the spell matrix dissolved.

“What is wrong?” Nal asked, still piloting the speeder.

“H-h-he was doing some sort of... I don't know, but he was doing something!” Miru responded, stepping back into the cockpit, still focused on me. “It was all bright and glowy!”

“Oh, yes. He does that,” Nal said, shaking his head, looking over his shoulder at me. “Is that safe to do inside a moving vehicle?”

“This one is. It's a protective barrier I can hold out in front of me,” I explained. “Nothing dangerous.”

“Interesting. Will it hold up to a blaster?”

“I have no idea. I'm going to have to test it out,” I answered. “I'm pretty sure I can cast it off to the side and let one of you shoot it. If not... Well, there was a reason I learned the healing spell first.”

As we casually talked about my magic, Miru looked back and forth between us, her eyes still wide in disbelief. Eventually us more or less ignoring her got on her nerves enough that she recovered.

“Alright, will one of you please tell me what the hell is going on!” She said, looking at Nal last. “Is the Boss some sort of cyborg?”

“He claims that he is not,” He answered, a smile still audible in his voice as he focused on piloting the speeder. “He claims he has some sort of energy inside him.”

The probable teenager looked back at me, glowering as she walked back and sat on the bench across from me. She still looked a bit unnerved by what she saw, but her annoyance was clearly helping her ignore that.

“Alright, out with it,” She said. “Nal clearly knows what’s going on, so I should know too.”

“I wasn’t planning on hiding it from you, Miru. I honestly just forgot,” I assured her, pulling the book away, feeling its familiar weight as it disappeared.

“Wha- Ho- What the hell, Deacon?” she said, staring at where my grimoire had just been. “Where did that just go?”

“Somewhere else,” I responded simply, breezing past her question. “Do you want me to explain what’s going on or not?”

She crossed her arms and gave me another look before nodding. I couldn’t help but chuckle before slowly going explaining the basics of my ability. I demonstrated how I could summon a sword before using that sword to cut myself, healing the wound while Miru watched. She then proceeded to hide a bolt in several places around the cargo space, which I would find every time with the clairvoyance spell.

“That... I don’t know what to make of that,” She finally admitted. “I guess that explains why Nal said you were the boss.”

“Wait, you’re responsible for that?” I asked, looking through the doorway. “Really? Boss?”

“Worse things to go by,” He pointed out. “Boss.”

“...Dammit.”

Muri giggled, our byplay setting her off. I smiled and chuckled with her, only to frown when I realized what was happening.

Her giggling turned to laughter, starting off light but quickly spiraling until it was clearly uncontrollable and manic. It seemed like floodgates were open, the terror she had been exposed to over the last few days finally catching up with her. Soon she was sobbing, and I had to jump up to catch her as she started sliding off of the bench, losing control of herself.

I held the young woman as she cried and shook, sitting on the floor of the small cargo space. She all but threw herself against me, gripping my shirt with a death grip, her knuckles turning white, even with her pink skin. I did my best to comfort her as she sobbed her heart out, releasing her emotion in a singular deluge.

Eventually, she fell asleep, having cried out any remaining energy.