

As we feared, it took an unfortunately long time for the hermit group to reach back out to us, with an entire day and morning passing before we heard from them again. Thankfully, they did not contact us just to say that there was no deal and that we should fuck off, which was honestly already better than I had feared at that point. Instead, they invited us back into their home.

After repeating the previous journey and arriving all over again, they guided us into the same dining hall and meeting room as before.

When we were settled in, Rosala once again took control over the settler's side of the conversation, not even bothering to wait this time. She sat down at the table exactly opposite me and immediately dove into the conversation, which was good, because at this point our patience was beginning to fray.

"We talked a lot about your offer," she said, and I resisted the urge to flipantly point out that I certainly hope they did, considering that's what we were waiting for. "We have some concerns, but we are tentatively interested."

I opened my mouth to ask about her concerns and assure her we are more than happy to address anything reasonable, but one of Rosala's compatriots cut me off.

"What exactly will you be taking?" A tight-lipped Zabrak asked, one of the few non-humans in the group.

"Anything that's worth taking that you guys don't need," I answered easily, my gaze shifting to the abrupt humanoid. "What's worth it is up to my people, as they are the experts. That said, I know we will almost certainly want any gas collectors and fuel transfer ships. Most of the equipment for the refining process as well."

"What about the buildings?" a woman asked, this time at a much softer tone.

"Oh... I don't think we need those," I admitted with a frown, looking over at Tatnia, who shrugged. "We keep a good stock of building materials, and I can't see hauling around the warehouse or any of the other structures would be worth the time. Why?"

"We live in the buildings, and might need to expand in the next few years," The woman who asked the question explained.

"We can leave plenty of the buildings behind," I confirmed. "Probably most, if not all of them. Again, anything you guys don't want to give, we won't take."

"And how do we know you won't leak our location out?" Another man asked, one who was older, rougher, with an accusing edge to his question.

"What reason would we have to?" I pointed out, looking confused. "We would have gotten what we wanted, and ratting you out... would there even be a point?"

"To get your money back!"

"Sir... we have a fleet of ships that makes our current group look small," I pointed out with a raised eyebrow. "If we wanted to take our money back, we wouldn't need any help doing it. But why would we? I have no issue paying reasonable people what they are due."

Rosala rubbed her face, as the questions being asked were clearly not the approved, or agreed-upon questions that the group discussed. If her weary sigh was anything to go on, it was likely the opposite, and her group had agreed they weren't necessary, but the people who asked them were too stubborn to drop them.

"We are also concerned that one small refinement lane isn't enough," Rosala said, after giving both of the people who spoke up a hard look.

"As I said before, we aren't here to take what you want," I reminded them, only to continue after a pause. "Out of curiosity, how many production lanes are here?"

"There are eight large-scale and four small-scale," Rosala explained, gesturing vaguely out to the plant through the nearby wall. "Technically, the smaller lanes are for batches of specific concentrations of quality, but they can just as easily be set to normal fuel."

I looked over at Tania, who subtly flashed a two with her fingers, mouthing that eight large lanes was two more than we already had. If this deal went well, we were looking at more than doubling our fuel refinement. I held back my excitement as much as possible, as that amount could make us almost entirely self-sufficient, even with our planned expansions.

"That's good, exactly what we are looking for," I said with a smile. "So, are there any more concerns?"

"We are concerned about the increase in activity..." Rosala responded. "But I assume you know how to be discreet."

"Of course. We already have strict security protocols in place, and my people are *heavily* vetted," I assured her. "But, if it makes you feel more secure, I can tell my people to never make a jump directly here, making at least one stop before redirecting."

That seemed to sit well with the group, and even though it was overkill with our already instituted security protocol, if it meant getting this fuel plant, I was willing to make the sacrifice. It was a bit on the paranoid side, since reading a jump destination from the initial jump was only one or two steps down from opening the airlock and using dousing rods, but I couldn't blame them for being careful.

"That would be greatly appreciated," Rosala confirmed with a diplomatic nod. "We are also concerned about payment. We want half up front."

"...While I can understand where you're coming from, a lot of what we will be paying you depends on the quality of the goods, which we won't know until we inspect them," I pointed out with a frown, considering the issue for a moment. "I'm willing to put a one-hundred-thousand-credit down payment to assure you we mean business. After that... Why don't we pay per shipment? My people will come up with the proper worth of the equipment and

calculate out a finder's fee. Then, before each load takes off, we will transfer the payment to you."

"Finder's fee? What happened to buying it?" One of the younger members asked, their brow furrowed. "Why would we only get a finders fee?"

"Because flat-out purchasing it from you was only on the table before we were talking about moving the entire facility halfway across the galaxy," I said, raising an eyebrow, watching the younger member. "I made that offer first, and I was clear that having to haul it away would mean I wasn't going to pay you as much. Purchasing it from you was me taking control of the plant, or at least part of it. Paying you a finder's fee is because we are now salvaging it."

The man seemed to swallow his words as I looked at him, not backing down in the slightest. I could tell just by looking at him that he thought he could drive up the price by demanding we pay for purchase rather than salvage, but I was not bending on this. At least not at this stage.

"I think we understand," Rosala responded, sending a withering look at the now shamed man, before standing up and leaning forward, holding out her hand. "Assuming none of that changes, I think we have a deal."

I smiled and stood as well, happily shaking her hand.

"That is fantastic. Now, is there anything we can do for you, anything special we could get or find for you that you might like instead of straight caps?" I asked. "I have a feeling you're pretty stable around here, and as you said, you have a fuel lane to make money if you need it."

"I... think we will have to discuss that among ourselves," she said, glancing over her shoulder before focusing on me. "When can we expect your people to start salvaging?"

"That depends on how some of our more recent missions have gone while we were waiting," I responded, just barely keeping my frustration out of my voice. "I'll have to reach out to them first."

I was relatively sure that the Salvage Fleet was warmed up and ready to go, but there was no way I was letting them come here unprotected. With any luck, one or more of our groups would be free and could coordinate a schedule to cover the salvage teams as they worked. Otherwise, we would be here for a while.

After another half hour or so of discussing the logistics of this operation and transferring over a hundred thousand credits to our new friends, we headed back to our ships, and I hopped on a call with my people.

I was happy to learn that the ever-growing Salvage Fleet was ready to tackle our new project. Some of the fleet had already been sent off to where the 4th Group had investigated, as they had successfully uncovered a small mining operation. The mine was defunct, but there was a tidy amount of automated equipment that would help keep our costs down as we further upgraded our own mines.

Unfortunately, 3rd Fleet was available to cover our salvage teams. While it was good that some of our larger starships could switch in and out for what would likely be a week or longer project, they were only free because the third mission we pulled from the black box, the CIS staging planet, turned out to be completely empty.

With the update and orders sent, our whole team, as well as all of Corvak's people were shipped back to the fuel depot, where we accessed every nook and cranny of the facility, getting the empty buildings warmed up, the defrosting systems up and running, and double checking the security systems, making sure everything was deactivated and safe for the salvage workers. We also found where they had stashed all the deactivated droids, which we added to the list of salvage we would be taking away.

There was actually a decent amount of droid workers, battle droids, and repair droids, all of which we were happy to make use of. Bought clean, the stored droids were worth close to two or three hundred thousand credits. I was starting to realize that by salvaging the factory instead of just moving in, we were likely going to save a considerable amount of credits.

When everything was finally set and ready, we packed up and left the plant behind. Once the Salvage Fleet arrived, plus its temporary escort, the *Hope* would send down a team of soldiers to provide ongoing security while our people worked. I was more than confident that our people could handle the situation, especially with the 3rd Group watching over them.

I was also more than ready to get off the frozen world. While the prize had been well worth the trip and effort, by the time that we left, I was starting to wish we had just found pirates or something holed up in the plant, so we would have simply taken them down and shipped them off, rather than dealing with ornery recluses. Even after the deal was shaken on, the people had followed us around as we inspected the place, commenting on everything we did and just generally being nuisances.

Eventually, when we arrived at our security outpost and were waiting for the usual scans and checks, I got called to the lounge for a hyperwave connect with General Syndulla. I was a bit surprised by the sudden contact, but quickly made my way to the lounge.

"Admiral Deacon, it's good to see you," She said. "Have you been well?"

"I certainly can't complain," I said, standing by the table to receive the call, rather than sitting. "Judging by the name, I get the feeling this is an official call. So tell me, what can the Skyforged Vanguard do for the Rebellion?"

"We would like to hire you to assist on a raid on Imperial assets," She explained. "An infiltrator recently observed a rather interesting pattern on an Imperial production planet. With the right team and planning, we believe we might be able to secure a significant portion of a recent run of [GAT-12 Skiprays](#), [Zeta-class Heavy Transports](#), and [Lambda-class shuttles](#)."

"What are the actual numbers?" I asked, mentally running through the general designs of the mentioned ships.

"Well, that's dependent on you and your teams," Syndulla admitted. "We believe we can steal a small number of each, but we were hoping with your expertise, we would be able to increase that by a significant amount."

"What sort of maximums are we looking at?" I asked. "And what's our window?"

"Well... the reason this caught our eye is that for a short window, all three runs will be waiting for either delivery or pick up, making them easy targets. According to our infiltrator, our window opens in three weeks, but closes two days after that," She explained, seemingly reading off of a datapad or something to the side. "The run size the infiltrator spotted before were three dozen Blastboats, just two dozen Heavy Transports, and two dozen Lambda shuttles."

"... Alright, we can work with that," I said with a nod. "I'll send 4th Group and an additional ground team to work with you. That's Ezra and Sabine's group, by the way. Expect them in... five days?"

General Syndulla tilted her head to the side for a moment and seemed to struggle with how she should react. Hearing that she would be seeing her former teammates was clearly a plus for her, but she was also clearly surprised that I had smoothly handed off the mission to a separate team, rather than having 1st Group take it on.

"I have the utmost confidence in my people, General Syndulla," I pointed out, reading her expression. "Not to mention the fact that Sabine and Ezra's team is made up of Mandalorians and Jedi, a significantly potent mix. Plus, the reinforcements I will be sending are clone troopers, with plenty of experience. They are more than capable of handling your mission."

"That... that's good to hear, I'm glad you're willing to work with us," She said with a smile. "I assume you'll want some of the ships as payment?"

I considered for a moment before shaking my head. In truth, both the shuttle and the heavy cargo transport were wildly impractical for the compact storage we liked to maintain, as their massive wings require vast amounts of vertical space. I was tempted by the blastboats, as they did follow my own preference of quality over quantity, and were powerful ships in their own right. Unfortunately, they were also stuck in a limbo between a starfighter and a light corvette. While some might like a ship that could kind of sort of function as both, I vastly preferred a ship that functioned brilliantly as one thing. Besides, I like that our starfighters were built custom in-house.

"I might have considered the Blastboats, but they don't really match up with what we are looking for," I explained vaguely. "I'd rather have fifty percent of the worth in credits. If that's too much, we can split our cut between payment and debt."

"They aren't going to like a straight fifty split," General Syndulla admitted with a frown.

"Then tell them if they want a lower percentage, I would have to charge for the mission itself, which would only go up depending on your level of success," I pointed out. "And it wouldn't be cheap."

"That will do it," she said with a smirk and a nod. "Pleasure doing business with you. I look forward to seeing Ezra and Sabine again."

"The pleasure was mine," I said with a nod. "May the Force be with you."

The Twi'lek nodded, and a moment later the connection shut down, the holoprojector going dark.