

"So, as I said, we are taking the offer Julius," I repeated once we were all sitting, getting an eager nod in return. "But I want to make this clear. This is not a pistol at dawn, airing your grievances and dueling to the death kind of situation. This is an execution. Cold, clean, and simple. We aren't holding back to be fair or giving you the opportunity to see the life leave anyone's eyes."

"I don't care. I may not be able to handle them being alive when Zandev is dead, but I'm not looking for a show," He agreed, nodding once. "I just want them dead, like you said, clean and simple."

"Good. Then my suggestion is that we wait until it's dark, until they are all asleep, and we catch them in their beds," I said, Miru wincing, but Nal and Tatnia nodding in agreement. "If I get my way, we wouldn't even be in the same building when they are all alive, but depending on what that garage you mentioned is made of, that might not be possible. Nal, do you think you could get your hands on some more ammo for the proton rifle?"

"Here? Easily," He said simply.

"Good. How about some night mission gear?"

"Night vision goggles?" He asked. "Or thermal? It is possible to have both, but pricey."

"Less than five hundred credits per pair?" I asked, the blue-skinned alien nodding in confirmation. "Then get five, they are a handy bit of gear, so there is no reason not to get our hands on them while we can."

He nodded again, quickly pulling out his datapad and starting to scroll through something.

"Next, I want to know what this garage and the area around it looks like before we start this," I said, looking at Tatnia. "Can you handle that? It might be as simple as having Racer look into public records, or you might have to take some pictures yourself. If that's the case, I don't want you to even land near their territory, alright?"

"I can handle that."

"Good. Once we get those pictures, we can start planning this for real," I said, turning to Julius. "You're welcome to stay here until we execute the plan. We have to make sure you're geared up properly anyway."

Tatnia and Racer made their way to the bridge while Calima made her way to her room to unpack. Miru and I took Julius down to the cargo bay, where we were keeping all of the spare gear we had acquired so far. He needed armor, a helmet, and a blaster rifle, which we had plenty to spare. He did have his own pistol, two of them, in fact.

"You like them?" He asked when he saw me looking at them. "They were my fathers, he gave them to me before he passed. The only thing he left me."

"What are they?" Miru asked. "I don't recognize the make."

"That doesn't surprise me, they are apparently pretty rare. I was gonna sell them, but Zandev convinced me not to," He admitted, looking down at the two blasters on either hip. "They are [Westar-35s](#). They pack a mean punch and are pretty accurate, but I never really invested the time in learning how to shoot them both at the same time."

By the time we had his armor and other gear set up, Nal was getting ready to leave. He took the MVR out to go shopping for what I asked for, driving the speeder bike right out of the starboard hangar. He dropped until he was five or six feet off the ground before his repulsors compensated, and he zoomed off.

"On a scale of one to ten, how difficult was what he just did?" I asked Miru, though Julius was the one who spoke up first."

"Oh. Right, on a civilian bike, that would be a hard eight," He said, still looking around the hangar curiously. "But a military bike is designed to go everywhere, including from high ledges to lower ground. It would have compensated for the change automatically."

"What about coming back in?"

"If he comes in slow, it should be fine."

I gave Miru a look, and she nodded in confirmation before turning to leave the hangar bay. As I was stepping through the smaller door, Miru turned and headed to her workshop. "Let me know if you need anything, Boss, I'm just tinkering!"

"Alright, have fun," I said, heading to the stairs, Julius following behind.

"So. she is a bit on the young side," He commented as we stepped onto the second deck. "Is she going to be coming with us?"

"No, Miru is our engineer," I explained, turning my head to look at him. "She is the one who designed the hangar modifications."

"Oh, alright."

It was only about an hour before Tatnia and Nal had completed their tasks, the crew plus Julius once again sitting down around the large table in the lounge. Nal had returned from his trip and unloaded two cases of ammo for the proton rifle and five smaller boxes containing

goggles that could switch between thermal and night vision. I carefully opened one of the latter boxes, examining the [goggles](#) before handing them to Nal to inspect.

After that, Racer used his holoprojector to show off the images that Tatnia and he found on the holonet, with minimal slicing required. The garage itself was surprisingly large, a double-floored structure with two large bays and what looks like the office portion next to that. The first floor was ferrocrete, while the second floor, which formed a lip around the structure, was some sort of metal paneling with a few windows. Everything was in pretty good condition, and there was a speeder and two speeder bikes parked into the front ferrocrete pad.

"I assume these are from before the Blood Cores settled in?" I asked.

"Yeah, by about four months," Tatnia answered. "Racer also dug up some shots of the surrounding area."

The holo-projection shifted, showing off a few buildings with the garage showing up a few times in the corner or background. After about ten photos Racer projected a wireframe version, clearly compiled from everything he had just shown us, outlining all surrounding buildings.

"Damn, that's useful," I said, examining the slowly rotating projection.

"Nova wasn't kidding when she said she upgraded him," Miru said proudly. "Racer has a hell of a lot of power and tools stuffed into his frame."

The astromech whistled a long string that sounded vaguely proud. After watching the projection for a few minutes, I motioned for Racer to stop the slow rotation.

"Okay, I think our best bet is to ambush them, most likely starting with you, Nal, up on this roof," I said, pointing out the three-story building across the street from the garage. "You should have no problem shooting down into these windows with the proton rifle. Considering just how many vehicles Julius says they have, sleeping on the ground floor is unlikely. Still, we need to be prepared for that."

I gestured for Racer to zoom in on the front of the building. When the view changed, I continued.

"Now, a lot of this depends on where they are, but I'm going to assume the garage doors will be closed. If they aren't, we can take advantage of that, but we plan for them being shut," I explained, pointing to a row of windows that dotted the first floor. "Once Nal opens fire, taking out as many as he can through the windows, Tatnia, Julius and I will come in through these lower windows here."

As I pointed, several basic outlines of people appeared on the exterior of the projected model. I gave Racer an impressed look before continuing.

"If they stay on the second floor, then Nal can take them all out, but once they make it down to the first floor, which I'm guessing they will try, we ambush them there."

I sat down in my chair, leaning back and looking at everyone. Nal, Tatnia, and Julius were listening closely, while Miru and Calima were listening with much less enthusiasm.

"Our biggest goal here is to keep them from getting on their speeders. Not just because we want them intact but because it would give them a major advantage in firepower. Miru..."

The pink-skinned mechanic sat up straight, eyes wide, clearly not expecting to be called on.

"I want you and Racer here, listening in to TPSF comms. Do you think you could crack into those Racer?"

The droid wiggled and whistled out a complicated tune, which, of course, meant nothing to me.

"He says that he won't be able to hear them word for word, that's too protected for him to slice without being noticed," Miru translated. "But, he could get enough information to know if they are responding to a general neighborhood."

"That's good enough. I'm hoping we can skip their involvement, and I need to know if that changes. Calima?"

"I assume you want to be ready to lift off, just in case?" She asked, having been a bit more prepared to respond than Miru. "I can do that... but I will warn you that there are security forces in space around the planet. They could try and stop us."

"I'm hoping that they won't take it that far, but if it comes to that, we will just have to outfly them," I said with a wince. "Can you do that?"

"Most likely. If we get really unlucky... It might be difficult, but I think I can handle it."

"Good. Alright, we could get this done tonight, or we could push it off tomorrow and get a little more time to prepare, any preference?"

"I would rather get this done with," Tatnia responded, leaning forward in her seat. "No use putting it off."

When Nal only nodded in agreement, and Julius looked like he was ready to do it right now, for obvious reasons, I considered the matter settled.

"That works for me. Let's get everything packed up and ready to go, then we can have an early dinner. After that, we head out."

Another series of nods from around the table, and we got to work. Miru, Nal, and I broke down the proton rifle and four of our blaster rifles, fitting them and the goggles into the cargo container attached to the MVR. When that was done, we gathered around in the lounge and shared our meal. As we ate, I looked over at Calima, who was listening to the conversations but was staying mostly quiet.

"Sorry that your first day is so eventful," I apologized. "We had no idea that things would kick off like this, but it's a good opportunity so we couldn't pass it up."

"I understand... You don't have to worry," She said with a smile. "This may be more exciting than I'm used to, but I had a feeling working with you would be like this when you described your last few weeks."

"Well, that's good," I responded. "I'm glad that it wasn't a surprise at least."

We finished dinner quickly, and it was time to get to work. Nal flew out on the MVR again, carrying our rifles so that we wouldn't have to, while Tatnia, Julius, and I called in a cab. It was starting to get dark by the time we landed several blocks from our target.

As we walked the rest of the way, a ten-minute trek through a few alleyways, we did our best to seem inconspicuous. Julius kept looking around as if he expected the Blood Cores to come swooping down at any minute, but I couldn't blame him for being nervous so close to where his friend was killed.

Eventually, we got to the building that Nal was waiting for us behind, having landed the MVR in an alleyway. There we waited, out of sight from the street, while it slowly got darker and darker. Eventually, Nal passed out the night vision goggles, and we all started assembling our rifles.

"There's a clear path to the garage from here, through these alleys," Nal explained, pointing to a small path between two abandoned buildings to his left. "Just keep walking straight until you reach the street."

"Alright, comm us when you're in position, and we will head in," I said, watching as he nodded and started climbing a nearby ladder, heading up to the roof.

A quick glance at Tatnia and Julius, and we headed out, with me in the lead, slowly making our way through the alleys, following Neal's instructions. We held our rifles tucked under our jackets to hide them as best we could, though it was obvious what we were carrying to anything more than a passing glance.

After another minute of walking, we stopped, having reached the road. Across the street was the garage, lights still on inside. We could hear thumping, loud music clear through the garage bay doors. I held up my hand as I spotted two people, a Rodian and a Weequay, sitting outside. They had something in their mouths, some sort of Star Wars cigarette equivalent that my extra knowledge didn't know about. I held up my hand to motion to Tatnia and Julus, and all three of us walked back enough to be covered by the shadows of their alley. I crouched down low and pulled out my comm, tabbing it to Nal.

"Nal, they are still awake, stay down until the garage goes dark," I said softly into the comms.

"... Understood," Nal replied just as quietly.

For the next two hours, we waited in the darkness of the dirty, trash-filled alley, waiting for the gang to finally shut down for the day. At ten minutes past the two-hour mark, just about when I started to worry that they would party all night long, the music finally cut off.

There was shouting from inside the garage, the responding complaining voices coming through even with the building mostly sealed up. After a while, the building quieted down, and after twenty minutes, it finally went dark.

"Can confirm, sleeping on the second floor," Nal said softly through the comms, confirming at least one portion of our plan.

The lights in and around the building turning off flooded the street with darkness. All the public lighting near the building had been destroyed, the nearest lights coming from far down the street. Silently, we all pulled the goggles down over our faces, toggling on the night vision. At first, I was overwhelmed by the brightness, but the goggles quickly compensated, revealing a new bright world, though tinged with green. After a minute, I switched to thermal, only to immediately switch it back when I realized it was useless through the solidly built structure.

We waited another hour for everyone to fall asleep before Tatnia, Julus, and I crossed the street, keeping our heads down and moving as silently as possible, not stopping until our backs were against the ferrocrete wall of the garage. Each of us lined up near a different window, each of us sharing a look before I held up one hand left hand, giving Nal the ready signal.

I adjusted my rifle, holding it ready as I let out a slow breath. I could feel myself wanting to cast my armor on myself. I felt naked without it, but I focused on the fact that this was not like the Separatist raid, if they even got a shot off at us, we had already fucked up.

Suddenly the relative silence surrounding us was broken by the familiar whining sound of the proton rifle charging from across the street before a beam of yellow energy punched through

one of the second-story windows. The whine immediately started again, firing not a second later.

A riot of shouting, screaming, and cursing echoed across the street as the Blood Core gang was cut in half in just over thirty seconds.

"I can't see the rest," Nal said, his voice coming from my jacket pocket, much louder now. "Coming down the stairs."

"Go!" I shouted, before turning and looking in through the window, the night vision goggles letting me see into the dark room easily.

Unfortunately, all I could see was the air speeder, filling up a large portion of the bay and blocking my view into the rest of the garage. I turned, planning to run around Tatnia and Julus to another window, only to see a staggering rapid spray of blaster bolts coming from inside the building, catching Julus in the side and throwing him to the ground, at least three bolts hitting him before he hit the ground.

A yellow beam of proton energy lanced down into the window from Nal, a choking scream cutting off the spray of energy, silencing whoever had surprised Julus. I pulled away from the structure, running around and watching as Tatnia focused and fired through her window. When I reached the window that Julus had been looking through, I peeked around the corner, moving away just in time to avoid catching another dozen sprays of lethal red energy.

"Fuck this!" I said, charging my bound armor and casting it immediately.

Now protected by glowing conjured energy, I turned around the corner, this time coming out completely. I tanked the two out of over a dozen blaster bolts that managed to hit and drilled my own triple shot burst directly into a half-dressed Weequay holding a massive repeater blaster cannon, standing over the corpse of a blue Twi'lek female. Two of my shots hit his chest, seeming to do very little, before my final shot somehow found his eye, taking off most of his head before his corpse fell to the floor.

"How many did everyone get?" I called out loud enough for Nal to hear me across the street.

"Two," Tatnia responded, still looking into the garage, her still rifle up.

"Five," Nal added, his voice coming through my comms.

"And I got one. Nal, keep us covered, but I think that was everyone!" I said, turning back to Julus, who was still on the ground.

Both Tatnia and I rushed to the younger man, who was pale and breathing slowly. Before I could say anything or start to heal him, he grabbed my hand.

"It's okay," He said. "I... I did what I needed to do. I don't mind following my brother."

"Yeah, but I bet he would want you to live," I said, pulling my hand away. "Now sit still. You're gonna be fine."

"No way, I know-"

Before he could continue, I pulled his jacket aside and poured a dual-cast healing spell into the charred wound on his stomach and upper chest. Whatever that bastard had been shooting, it had been powerful because it punched right through his armor and started to cook him. I emptied my magic into him, his eyes widening as he felt it suffuse his wounds.

"Wh-what was that?" He asked, looking up at me. "What-"

"Team secret," I said, shaking my head with a smirk. "Just be thankful I like you, now keep still."

After a few seconds, I pumped him full of healing magic again, repeating it twice more until his color had marginally returned. He was looking at me with wide eyes, but before he could say anything, I shook my head.

"No, not now. We have work to do," I said. "You can ask questions when we are done. Alright?"

He nodded slowly before starting to push himself up.

"No, not yet," I said, pushing him back down flat. "A few more times, then we can get to work. Tat, keep an eye out, this is going to take a minute."