

“So, have I understood it correctly, Ms Halcyon, that you would wish us to look into the weapons smuggling going into Ol’val because...?” Yumni left the end of her question hanging, crossing her long, slender fingers as she gazed at the pint-sized Pantoran opposite.

“I’d like you to look into it,” Leeadra began, “because we’ve been trying to figure it out by ourselves and clearly,” she paused to let out a reluctant sigh, “brute force has not been the answer.”

If the Kaminoan had a reaction, it was either very well hidden or so minute the Pantoran couldn’t read it. Nevertheless, she sensed some fleeting sensation of smug amusement from her part. Enough to chafe, anyway.

“I see,” Yumni Ha replied with a soft nod. “I am sure you know this is really not our forte? We are not in the business of preventing shipments, rather the opposite.”

“I am aware,” Leeadra replied tensely. “Trust me, I would not have asked otherwise.”

“I understand,” the Kaminoan nodded placatingly. “We shall strive to meet your requests, but there are certain costs associated in such endeavors.”

“Do you charge hourly?” Lee asked sourly.

“No,” the Kaminoan replied with a hint of amusement. “But rest assured a detailed invoice will be attached at the completion of our task.”

“Oh, I’m sure it will, Ms Ha, I’m sure it will...”

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“Leave them over there, anywhere on the floor is fine,” Yumni called out as a pair of House brutes hauled over a pile of various blasters and slugthrowers. The weapons had been confiscated, or reclaimed, from various rebel gangers and she was certain they still had a story to tell. Leeadra had done the best she could with them as well, but the make and model of those weapons was utterly random and though she’d tried a few wild leads, nothing was coming up. None of the usual suspects was arming them, that much was sure.

“What do you expect to find?” she asked the Kaminoan as she paced over and began inspecting the pile of guns, picking up a rifle here or a blaster there and inspecting it like produce at a market.

“Marks,” she replied absent-mindedly, clearly more focused on the lifeless pieces of durasteel than the Pantoran next to her.

“There are and aren’t any. Loads of markings, but all random. Hutts, Empire, First Order, Black Hand... you name it.”

“Not those sorts of markings, I meant marks. Scuffs, dents, the like.”

“Well they sure got scuffed up when you had them thrown in a pile...”

“That is of little consequence. Fresh and old scuffs are easy to discern between. If one has an eye for detail.”

“And you do?”

“Ms Halcyon, almost everyone on Kamino does. Why do you suppose we became so good at splicing?” Yumni replied with the faintest hint of humor in her tone.

Pausing, she selected a number of guns and pointed out a few more, picking up the weapons while Lee got to levitate the rest and dragged them over to the center of the hangar bay floor. One by one, she began to line them up, shuffle them around and then line them up again until finally the weapons stood in various clusters, each cluster neatly aligned into three rows.

“So?” Lee inquired, looking a bit perplexed at this farewell-to-arms art piece.

“I may have something. No, I do have something.”

“Would you care to clue me in too? Or do I have to pay you for that as well?”

“Crates.”

“What?”

“The crates these weapons are shipped in. They’re KMW-36s.”

“How do you know?”

“I used to use them as well, but no more. Unless it’s a dump job. The crates are terrible, bang up the merchandise and scuff it. Especially the three separator bars, they lack padding and that is why,” she picked up a gun and showed her. “You get scuff marks here, here and here.”

The Pantoran looked at the blaster and the others arranged around it, turning it around in her hands and squinting. Begrudgingly, she had to admit the seasoned spacefarer might have a point. “So, what does that help us? Shipping crates seem pretty ubiquitous to me.”

“And that they are,” Yumni agreed. “And the KMW-36 is especially so. But, I know the vendors who sell them and I think whoever is supplying these people around Ol’val is probably getting his crates from them.”

“You expect they’d talk?”

“I expect them to be willing to make a good deal.”

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“No, absolutely not! The client-supplier relationship is sacred and I would never do anything to compromise it. If my other clients found out, I’d be ruined!” the Togrutan arms-dealer scoffed, emphasizing his outrage with a wide-armed gesture.

“Calm yourself, Nestor, you are not being interrogated by the CSA, so you can dispense with the theatrics,” Yumni stated bluntly, unphased by his acting. “I don’t expect you to hand me a name. I am merely interested to buying some of your stock.”

“Buying? But you mentioned the KMW-36s...?”

“I was merely interested to know if you’d gotten any good ones. I’d seen a few lying around in a Shadowport and found them to be... less egregious than I remembered. Maybe you have received some which aren’t going to break the first time a deckhand drops them?”

“Oh? Oh yes, yes! Fine product, quality product. Sturdy and secure, with a low price too. Manufacturer improved the process, made them much better. And cheaper. How many do you need?”

“How many do you have?”

He blinked. “Erm, three hundred in storage, but I can get you as many as you’d like...”

“Three hundred will do. I will drop by the warehouse to pick them up.”

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“And that is the last of ‘em,” Nestor stated contently as the droid haulers pulled the last of the crate stacks inside the *Esperanza*’s cargo hold.

Yumni nodded thoughtfully, before turning to face the man and pointing at the poorly draped-over stack of crates in the back of his warehouse. “What about those? They look like KMW-36s to me.”

The Togruta glanced over, before stepping in between her and the crates, as if he could somehow prevent her from noticing them after the fact. “They, uh, are not for sale. I am holding a reservation.”

“So they are not sold yet?”

“Well, not technically, but this is a good buyer and...”

“Double.”

“Excuse me?”

“I will pay you double for them, in credits, right now.”

The man licked his lips. Nestor was nothing if not shrewd and that price was pure profit. She could see his greed getting the better of him, overpowering the common sense that no doubt screamed for him to stick to the previous deal.

But credits now were better than credits later.

“Deal!”

She suppressed a smug smile as she reached out for her credit. It would all go on her expense report anyway.

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The door slammed open with the force of a breaking storm, a dour-faced Duros stomping inside the spacer bar and growling to himself. Walking up to the counter, he ordered something stiff, downed it and called for a re-fill.

He looked exactly like the man she was looking for.

Making her way across the cantina as if going for a refill of beer herself, she pulled up next to the Duros and waved her glass at the bartender. While the man did his job, she turned to glance at the disgruntled merchant. “Business troubles?”

“What’s it to you?” the Duros spat.

“Nothing, just feeling somewhat annoyed with Nestor, that is all. Supply troubles, he said, and couldn’t pay for his usual shipment.”

“Hmph, rich coming from that punk. Said the same thing when I came for my crates and he didn’t have them. How do supply troubles work both ways anyway?”

“Beats me,” Yumni shrugged. “I just suspect he doesn’t want my merchandise anymore. Though I’m not blaming him, the KMW-36s are a tough sell. Well, best of luck,” she added before accepting her refilled glass and heading back to her table.

The man shifted, turning his head to follow the Kaminoan. He followed her with his gaze, looked down at his glass and slid off his chair, raising his voice as he took a few jogging paces to catch up with the long-gaited female. “Hey, wait! You said you had crates to sell?”

“Yes, a whole host. Why? Are you interested in buying?”

“I might be, if the price is right.”

“Well, I should be rid of them, but with the supply problems Nestor mentioned... I don't know. Maybe there is a shortage coming, they could be valuable...”

“Hmph, how about this? I give you an extra ten percent on top of what I'd pay Nestor. Sound good?”

“Hmm... And how many would you be buying?”

“Thirty six pieces, my usual order.”

“Ah, see, I don't deal in small business. I sell in bulk.”

“Ugh, what's the minimum lot size then?”

“Three hundred units.”

“Three hundred?!” the Duros spat. “I don't have room for that many on my ship!”

“A shame,” she sighed. “Although...”

“Although what? Quickly now, I have shipments to make!”

“I could sell you the three hundred crates *and* keep them stored for you, for a nominal extra fee. Consider it a stockpile. You will have a steady supply of crates for a while and don't have to worry about Nestor running out at an inconvenient time.”

The Duros grumbled before doing some mental arithmetics. “Very well, *scalper*. It is cutting it tight, but we have a deal.”

“Excellent, I will have them sent over immediately. A pleasure doing business with you,” she smiled, offering a toast which he accepted with a long face.

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The blip on her scanner screen had stopped moving. That was good. It meant the Duros had reached his destination and was probably waiting for a shipment. The tracker she'd placed in one of the crates had led her to a rather remote part of the galaxy, even compared to the usually rather obscure reaches of Dajorra and Arx. There were few maps that charted these systems and something about that felt thrilling. As if any number of new stars and planets could be waiting just beyond the next nebula, and the countless profits yet to be made that they all represented.

The Duros had taken his ship down onto a reddish moon, the satellite orbiting a ravaged hunk of a planet close to the system's sun. Preliminary scans hinted at a high concentration

of rust as the origin for the moon's color and judging by the trails of ships moving in and out, he wasn't the only trader interested in this place.

Sipping some more distilled water, a luxury that reminded her of Kamino aboard her otherwise spartan vessel, Yumni Ha considered her options. There were many ways she could approach this situation, but one of them intrigued her pocket book the most. It was the one she would go for.

Taking her ship down to the rust moon, she soon found out why such a source had dyed the satellite red. Piles of junk, garbage and refuse from all around the galaxy was pouring in from massive haulers while scavengers of all sorts scrambled over the juiciest piles to strip away any item of value.

The mountains of scrap seemed to reach the horizon, which they probably also did.

Under the New Republic's rule, such scrap planets had been outlawed, but it seemed it still paid to ship your scrap this far out into the Rim to avoid that. Especially if it also allowed the scavengers to run a profitable illegal arms trade on the side.

Taking her ship down on a landing pad far enough away from the Duros' ship she wouldn't be noticed, she waited for the man to depart before approaching the venue he'd frequented. An unsightly shack of corroded durasteel sheets and ancient rockcrete, covered in head to toe in fine red dust, the shop did not look anywhere like a typical arms dealer's establishment. At least not until she stepped inside and saw the racks of weapons stacked everywhere in a haphazard manner, the owner seemingly caring little for the quality or type of arms as long as there were many.

"Pardon me," she intoned towards a hooded form that stood three feet below her in stature. "I would be interested in purchasing some of your... merchandise."

The robed figure, clearly possessing a second set of upper limbs, glanced up at her and let out a series of screeches that she could only guess the meaning of. However, she did not have to wait for long to surmise the merchant's intent as he waddled over to a large scale and snatched the controls for an ancient mag-hauler droid from the wall. Letting out another series of inquisitive chirps, the shopkeep began to maneuver guns off the shelves and onto the scales with the help of the mag-hauler, dumping piles of blasters unceremoniously upon the flat durasteel plate.

At least the aurebesh digits on the scale's screen were legible.

She halted the loading at half a ton, raising her hand in a passivating gesture. "That is quite enough. How much would this be?" She received another chittery reply and decided to merely hand over her credit chit. She'd be adding the costs to Leadra's bill anyway.

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“So, tell me again why we’re here?” Leeadra stated impatiently, her anxiety made worse by the looming presence of the redheaded Aedile and her Chiss superior, though the latter was mercifully only represented via holo.

“You wished to see the arms supplies dry up, did you not?” Yumni stated as they all observed the procession of dots, thirty six in total, snaking along on a nondescript map. “I believe these will no longer be an issue.”

“A bold claim,” Lucine Vasano replied, her tone hinting at a challenge. “I’d hate if your overconfidence turned out to be precisely that.”

“Mistress Vasano, I never promise that which I cannot deliver,” the Kaminoan replied with a curt bow, before gesturing back at the screen.

“Once those crates stop moving, you will know where the rebels gather to get their shipments from.”

*“Trackers in the arms crates? Resourceful,”* Rhylance commented over the holo as he rubbed his chin thoughtfully. *“And what made you sure they would not sweep for such trackers?”*

“I am sure they did, which is why I made them sensor-wand activated,” Yumni explained. “Which does mean they scanned every last crate. But only once.”

“But how did you even manage to sell those weapons to them? They don’t just buy from anyone...” Lee inquired, still puzzling over all of this.

“Oh, I found a man who’d recently gotten himself in debt over some bulk container purchases. He was more than happy to meet me halfway for another shipment, considering his ship was rather small. Which, I suspect, is also why you never caught him.”

None of the three deigned the explanation worthy of a response.

The blips on the screen slowed down, piling into a heap and then falling still. Everyone was silent. One of the blips turned red.

“What does that...?” Leeadra began.

“They have opened one of the crates. They are probably inspecting the merchandise, as is custom.”

“Do we have a location? I will send our security details in at once and sweep them out,” Lucine hissed impatiently, the lust for revenge heavy in her voice.

“No need,” Yumni replied, pulling up a data pad from her hip and tapping a few times on the screen. The blips all blinked green in an instant, pulsing faster and faster until the color stabilized to a permanent hue.

“You should tell your men to pick up your foes for interrogation. And tell them to wear rebreathers. The gas tends to linger.”

Leeadra stared at the screen with her mouth slightly agape while the Kaminoan wrote down a few more lines on her datapad and then handed over a flimsiplast printout. “Here, my invoice. Oh, and please have the crates delivered to the docks. They are ALaS Co property. Or you can buy them, if you wish. I am sure we can come to a mutually beneficial arrangement.”

“Now if you’ll excuse me, I have a considerable number of shipping crates to repatriate...”