My ears twitched, and I opened my bag, set it aside, and ensured I had a couple of extra magazines, frags, and flash grenades ready to party. I was coming back in as the sun was setting, and tracking in the day was much easier than at night. One of the things I had planned to start learning was to find those same tracks during the day as I could at night. It was a skill that I also wanted to pick up.

I grinned and got my goggles ready, but it was not quite time yet. Attacking as night fell would be the most ideal, and my scopes were not meant for the night more than a day. Although, with infrared, it was not too bad as the leaves really did limit how much sun came and heated the ground. Still, the night was better for multiple reasons, and for now, I wanted to scout.

Slowly, after putting my pack a small distance from my hunt, I got lower, and my eyes settled on a footprint that looked really recent. I slowly moved toward a spot where I could look around a tree, where I heard someone breathing. I saw it, then a Dark green-skinned person looking away from me. I slowly got to the ground and noticed that the tree he was near had a mark.

They were about to walk into a trap I set. I lowered myself prone and started to crawl into the underbrush. I grinned as I saw my trap. It was one of my simpler ones meant to inflict pain and injury. I wished I had some time to scrounge and pick up something to break up the human outline like I did the other nights, but I think optimal attack time was about to come as I brought my gun up and was just settling in watching as the guy stepped forward and tripped my trap.

I could not believe how fast things were happening as I watched the loose stick holding back the spike break and swing a sharpened stick straight into the person's ankle. A sharp scream of pain as I saw the stick go through their ankle, skewering them. They dropped their gun, and I heard increased movement. “What is happening!?” I heard three different people call out as they started to come up to the person whose ankle was destroyed.

Looking down the infrared scope, I watched as they broke through the trees from just beyond them. Five people just walked into my scope, and I watched, waiting for the perfect moment.

“Dale, Are you okay?” One of them asked, moving forward.

“FUCK~! Something got me, man, fucking hurts; it went through my damn ankle!”

“Fuck, How bad is it?”

A third one came up, and one was behind the tree, and the other was a bit far.

“Fuck, this is bad; he needs serious medical help; without sending him out of the forest to be enslaved to get the treatment, we can only pay that crazy bitch back,” The third one continued to talk for a second, their voice feminine but I did not care as my smile was shark-like as I had three key points. First, they are bounties, not bounty hunters. Second, they are all in range, with a single sweep of my assault rifle and one rapid fire. Third, they would be completely surprised.

My thumb turned my assault rifle to rapid fire, and my finger was already on the trigger as I aimed at the guy who was the hardest to hit; my finger pulled the trigger as my ears flattened against my head, muffling the noise as my gun began to kill.

The surprise was complete, and my first shot blew a hole in the chest of the person I was aiming at, and I swept from left to right. The rifle kicked against my shoulder as I watched all of their eyes widen, and the last person talking reacted the fastest, leaping away and dropping to the ground as I swept the rest of them, tearing new holes into their bodies. Blood splattered, and screams erupted, and I heard a notification as those screams died.

“I SURRENDER, I SURRENDER!” was yelled from the one eating dirt as I killed the other four. I stopped pulling the trigger, and my ears perked up. “Please, Don't kill me; I don't want to die in this hell hole. Please,” I heard the woman sobbing.

“Shut the fuck up,” My voice snapped, “If you want to live.”

The woman shut up instantly, and I listened. I heard nothing—no birds or animals, only insects, which had been true whenever I shot my gun. I did not hear anyone coming from anywhere, but I was still hidden and still had half my magazine. “If you want to live, you will answer my questions; first, how many are in your group?” I said.

“Five, including me. We were all here when you started shooting.”

I doubted that, but I did not hear any more. “What crime did you commit?”

“Larsony of more than a hundred thousand credits in value,” She sobbed.

That was the most tame crime I have heard. “I will be able to check your bounty,” I added, and she sobbed more.

“A was found criminally liable for the death of an elderly woman because I did not know that if I cut power, they would die.”

“So murder.”

“Accidental murder, but enough that I did not want to take on the sentence. I went through too much to be a medical assistant! Fuck, I hate it.”

“Shut up,” I snapped, and she started to sob in the dirt. I slowly got up, not hearing anything around us, and I moved closer and found the woman. When she bit the dirt, her rifle was a foot or two away as she jumped, and I pushed the barrel of my gun against her head as I looked her over. She was a green-skinned person, too, like the other person I noticed, and she had a large backpack. I frowned as she sobbed, and now was the moment. “You will follow my orders exactly; if you deviate, I will ensure you are dead. I might not even be able to collect the bounty

because your head will smash to bits," I told her, and I stepped back, "You are to stand up slowly; your hands will not exit my vision, and after pushing yourself up onto your knees, you will have your hands above your head before moving from your knees into a standing position."

The woman put her hands into a push-up fashion, pushed up from the ground onto her knees, put her hands above her head, and followed my instructions exactly. She was trembling, and I ordered her to slowly turn around. As she did so, an attractive green face came into my vision despite her being dirty from eating dirt in that dive. "Now, do you still have a weapon on you? Tell me now, or I will make your life worse. The more you tell me the truth, the better you will be later."

"I- I have a handgun in the back of my pants and on my right calf."

What began as me slowly disarming her after switching to my handgun. It took time, but I had her take off her pack, and I needed to get the capture collar from my bag. It took over an hour in total before I walked her back to my bag, and finally, I put her in a collar and did the orders to disarm her from hurting me.

Then I got back to looking at all of their things. I started to ask questions again: "Do not lie to me. What is your name?"

"Ka' Tar." She sobbed

"What were you doing out here?" I asked.

"The main prisoner area here in Saints Forest needs goods and supplies. That small group and I are looking for something to sell. If we run into another group of criminals, we might kill them if they are solos. If we find bounty hunters, we kill them. We scavenge for mushrooms and edible plants and find meat to eat. Anything really that can sell does not matter," Ka' Tar replied.

That made sense, and I pulled up the carcass I got, "What is this animal? How much is it worth?" I asked.

"That is one of the Ringlung, native to this planet, which means Tree Hopper; they are one of the main predators in this forest. If they catch you off guard, they will kill you. They climb trees and then hop on top of their prey. They are one of the best meats we have in this forest," Ka' Tar said as I checked out the valley. I needed to make it to base camp to get the tablet to collect the bounties.

I pushed the green woman into the valley after figuring no one was there after a quick check. "So, what about them are valuable?" I asked Ka' Tar while keeping a lookout as we crossed the valley.

“Almost everything. The criminals around here are remarkably low on foodstuffs, and we scavenge a lot from the Bounty Hunters. Without bounty hunters coming in to hunt the criminals, we probably would have starved. Then again, there is a lot of food in the forest, too, but we are also not savages and want the little things Bounty Hunters bring.”

That made a sick sense. If they were ignored, they would slowly decrease in technology until they had only old guns and what new criminals brought in. I pursed my lips and started to ask other questions about various things in the forest. As we finally made it to the giant stairs, I brought her up into the cavern and unloaded the load. Then, I went back out to take pictures of the dead bodies before forcing the woman to dig a hole for them.

I felt like I was making these NPCs do something pretty horrific if you thought about it too much. Seriously, Each time I did it I bet they had to think that they might be digging their own grave. Unfortunately for them, that did not matter to me at this point. I needed to get things done and these people had a bounty on them for a reason.

Speaking of which. I checked my notification as I took a picture of my captured bounty.

—
New Trait Unlocked - Novice Ambusher.

You remain unseen till the most optimal moment before letting death spread among your enemies.
—-

—
Bounty: Ka’ Tar Hobble
Race: Goblin Human
Crimes: Grand Theft, Murder of the Elderly
Affiliation: N/A
Federation Bounty: 5000 Federation Credits
Wanted Dead or Alive
Note: Has a medical degree and finished top of their class. Unknown if this matters as they have no work experience.
—

So Ka’ Tar did not lie to me, which is interesting. The fact that she is a medical assistant might be good for Nyava. If I want to grow my Corporation, I would need more medical personnel at some point, and a slave medical assistant might be good. It was something that I would have to think about. It's not like I would be losing much money compared to some of the other bounties I encountered in this forest.

Before I headed out, I remembered that blood inside an animal was not what you wanted before you started to butcher it. So I took a container, and I took some time to string up the carcass and cut open the neck, and blood started to flow into the container.

After that, I took her back outside and started the gruesome cleanup. Instead, I made her dig a hole in the forest instead of the cave. I did not want to lug the bodies back to the camp. Honestly, after taking pictures of Ka'Tar's group, I realized all of them were small potatoes. Each was worth around five thousand credits, if not less. In total, they were worth nineteen thousand five hundred credits. The payday for them was not even one of the previous groups.

As I made her do, it turned to night. Once we were done scavenging for everything, I brought her back to the cave and let her eat before putting her into the prison. Now, it was time to learn how to butcher and skin. It was going to be messy, but I wanted to see if I would enjoy it.

I think I might be in a learning craze.