

Shadow Droids

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Most of the pirate groups of the Cularin system have a very set operating procedure. While it varies from the Brotherhood to the Blood Velkors to any of the nameless dozen other loose organizations that exist in the system, most of them share at least one common characteristic -- the most critical work is always relegated to the most experienced pilots and gunners. Of late, reports have surfaced that this might be changing. Droids have been observed piloting pirate vessels, making deliveries, picking up shipments, and doing all the things that one might reasonably conclude should be done by organics. That the droids have been entrusted with such duties could mean several things, but most agree that the two primary possibilities are quite unpleasant. First, the work might be so dangerous that it is given to droids, who are by their nature expendable and replaceable. Second, the droids might be significantly more advanced than anything their creators on Uffel have let the public become aware of.

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While the cantinas of Cularin do not prohibit droids, as a rule, a number frown on the presence of automatons within their environs. Part of this is simply a matter of atmosphere; the cantina is a lively place, full of laughter and drink. Most droids are not programmed for laughter, and drinking will, at best, short them out. They tend to be quite stolid and, in many senses, boring compared to the typical cantina denizen.

It was in just such a cantina, then, that OPS elected to begin its investigation. Using a microtransceiver to relay signals to the central OPS location, an undercover agent transmitted the following snippets of conversation that were deemed potentially relevant to understanding the role of the droids in current pirate activities.

OPS: "Hey, barkeep -- Rodian ale?"

A sound of a glass sliding along the bar follows, and then a gentle "glug, glug."

OPS: "So, anything new around here? I notice you've kept this place droid-free. Good to see."

?: "Not sanitary, danged things. Leak oil all over my floor. Disrupt sensors. It's easier to just leave them out in the cold than it is to deal with all their hassles."

OPS: "Yeah, I hear you."

Another "glug, glug."

OPS: "You know what I can't figure?"

?: "What's that?"

OPS: "I can't figure why anyone would let one of those things pilot a ship. Why would you want to trust your life to a droid, of all things? A droid!"

?: "They're not letting those things fly commercial liners, are they? You know you can't trust those machines. They always break down at the worst time. I mean, look at this here spigot. I tap it sometimes, and ale comes out. I tap it other times, and I get a rush of air that smells like the back half of a bantha. And it's just a spigot -- droids got lots more parts than this. Lots more parts. Easier to break 'em down."

OPS: "Never heard of a droid flying a commercial ship. But I hear some of them are flying . . . private vessels?"

There is a sound of something sliding across the bar.

OPS: "Know anyone who might know about droid pilots?"

Long pause.

?: "Why would anyone want to know about things you just can't trust?"

OPS: "I have some . . ."

A sound of something else sliding across the bar.

OPS: ". . . business arrangements to make. Things droids might be good for. You know anyone who might know about droid pilots?"

???: "Heard you the first time. Yeah. I think I might. Check the corner booth. Ask him about shipping and receiving. But don't mention I sent you over."

A long pause follows, and the sound of footsteps.

OPS: "I hear you're into shipping and receiving."

???: "Dat's dependin'. Whatta yousa wantin' ta know?"

OPS: "I have some goods that need to be shipped. I need a specialist who can meet my unique needs."

???: "Meesa not dinkin' yousa gots any bombad uniquer needs. Meesa dinkin' yousa gots da same needs dat alla udder people's gots. Yousa needs ta make da credits, but yousa not knowin' how ta do dat. My knowin' how."

OPS: "I'm thinking I need some droids to do the transporting."

???: "Mechaneeks? Why yousa wanna use bombad mechaneeks, when meesa gots all kinda okieday transports? Yousa not affordin' real peoples?"

OPS: "Let's just say I've heard good things about droids lately. That they might be useful."

???: "Let's ussen say dat yousa askin' bombad dangerous questions. Da mechaneeks not good news. No, deysa bombad ugly news."

OPS: "What do you mean?"

???: "Meesa meanin' what meesa sayin'. Mechaneeks? Bombad. Meesa canna make it more easy dan dat. Yousa want sumpin' shipped? Yousa come to da right place. Yousa want mechaneeks? Yousa needs ta find someone else. Meesa don't play dat."

OPS: "Why not? Is there something wrong with the droids? Can't they pilot just fine? I mean, you can program them to do almost anything you want, right?"

???: "Yessa, da mechaneeks, dey can be given da bombaddest programmin'. But dat's not makin' dem good. Yousa askin' mya doughs? Meesa dinkin', sumpin's bombad wrong wid da droids dat's doin' da pilotin'. Mya seen some. Deysa nuttin' but trouble. Red eyes, and havin' too many of da fingers."

OPS: "But are they good at piloting?"

???: "Da mechaneeks, day as good as almost any bombad pilot in da system. Dat don't mean day gonna be good ta use. Just means day gonna fly straight."

OPS: "So what's wrong with them? What's so bad about wanting to use droids to do some of the work?"

???: "See, yousa confuzzed. Yousa dinkin' all mechaneeks is like all mechaneeks. Not all mechaneeks like all da udders. Some of dem, deysa made bombad evil. Yousa not wantin' ta get in da way of bombad evil mechaneeks."

OPS: "Evil? But droids can't be evil. Droids can't be anything other than what they're programmed to be. I think you're trying to scare me into using your product."

???: "Mya dinkin', yousa asked enough questions. Mya dinkin', yousa not gonna be good business."

There is a clicking sound, not unlike the safety catch being deactivated on a blaster pistol.

???: "Mya dinkin', yousa needs ta be goin' now."