

Quill

Location: Hyperion Hub

Time: 1201, 5-15 GM, 1335 A.C.

Quill watched Hezdor and Doran file out of the room after the rest of the squadron, Doran looking fit to burst with excitement. He was very good at not showing it, but Quill knew that glint in his eye and the light step of his feet. He couldn't wait to get to work.

The mercenary commander returned to her desk, taking a seat and allowing herself to lean back in it, looking up at the ceiling with her one good eye.

After a minute she leaned forward and waved a drawer open. Reaching in, she pulled out what appeared to be an eyepatch. Not just any eyepatch, though.

As Quill placed the black piece of smooth metal and plastic onto her eye, small micro-filaments reached out gently and twined with others surgically embedded under her flesh. She felt a slight tug as the filaments twisted together, weaving an airtight seal where metal met fur and skin. Another small tug as the patch adjusted to the shape of her face, and suddenly she could easily forget it was there.

She didn't even let out a hiss as a sharp stab of pain rammed through her skull, the jab gone as fast as it had happened, and suddenly her depth perception manifested itself again.

Quill blinked, and her brain told her both eyes did even as she knew only one eye even had a lid to blink with. The patch was expensive, a gift she'd received in return for services rendered. Billions upon billions of transistors went to work in the eyepatch, interfacing with tiny plastic and metal plates wired into her optic nerve, passing information back and forth between each other. As she turned her right eye, so would the image in her left 'eye'. When she focused on something in the distance with her right, so would her left. The only way her brain could tell there was something amiss was that whenever she blinked, she could still see out of her left eye. Quill preferred it that way. At one point she'd considered having her right eye replaced as well.

She smiled. No. Things like that were to be earned, as all scars are. Besides, she often preferred to leave the eyepatch off. She found it useful for intimidating the recruits and even veterans.

But this was business. And when you did business, you wanted to look like you could more than handle yourself without scaring the client off. The four claw marks that had raked a good chunk of her face away always did that well enough. She opened the channel.

The Thanos manager looked huffy and stuffed up, just like all corporate managers. The big, floppy ears didn't help. His nose twitched at her as her holographic image appeared before him as he appeared before her. "Miss Quill, you wanted to discuss your contract?"

"I did," the feline leaned back, crossing her legs and staring right at the corporate lackey. "You wanna tell me why our contract with Thanos is being cut short?"

"Ah, yes," the lupine coughed nervously. "You would have to speak with your superiors about the details, but Thanos has decided to terminate our contract with the Arclite Falcons at the end of the quarter."

"You want to send me up the chain, I starting tugging on yours," Quill snapped, letting her lips part a bit to display her fangs. "The Falcons are the best damn mercenaries in the sector, which means we're the best damn mercenaries in the galaxy. You planning on protecting your ships with good feelings?"

The lupine's looked as if he was chewing on his tongue for a moment. "Believe me, ma'am, the decision was entirely no part of mine, but the decision was not due to the efficiency of your personnel or yourself."

Something about that set off a lightbulb for quill. "You can no longer afford us."

The wrinkle in his nose told her everything before he even spoke. "Recent developments have show us it is more financially sound to contract out more... affordable protection. I'm sure that such skilled mercenaries as yourselves will have no trouble finding other work."

"Heard that before," Quill said. "Why not knock off a couple of the cheaper groups? You know we're good for it."

"Because the last time we actually needed your protection was five months ago!" the manager snapped, then tensed a bit.

Quill let the pause hang for a moment. "So you also think you don't need us," the feline said quietly.

"Again, it was not my decision," he said. "But pirate activity in the sector is down. The Hyperion Sector is becoming tamed, Miss Quill."

Quill stayed silent, just staring at him.

"There's one more thing you should know." Another nervous cough. "We've hired another pilot for your next mission with us."

Quill didn't move. Better if she didn't visibly react. "Your confidence in us is overwhelming," she said dryly.

"The cargo for this run is particularly expensive," the manager insisted, tapping at a datapad that was out of view. "Although pirate activity is at an all-time low in the sector, we just want to be sure this convoy will reach its destination unmolested. I'll send you the details of the mercenary we've hired."

"Uh-huh," Quill said, glancing at the small notification on the holographic screen indicating a data dump. "Keep my number."

She tapped the interface on her desk, and his image disappeared, the connection terminated.

The feline leaned back once more, reaching into a pocket of her fatigues and pulling out a stick of *jyn*. The stuff tasted like artificial strawberries wrapped in three layers of plastic, but she enjoyed chewing it. Helped her focus.

She pulled up the dossier of the mercenary that Thanos decided she needed. One of the names got her attention, her eyebrow rising.

"Hello, Buck," she muttered. "Back from the dead, are we?"