

After a moment of incredulously studying the cudgeled-together connection between the station and the ship, I realized I was going to have to take the first step. With a long sigh, I stepped forward onto the connection. Miru, ever fearless in the face of new and exciting things, was quick to follow.

"I cannot believe that this area is still under pressure," Miru said, her scanner out as she analyzed the hack job. "The patching is three layers thick, consisting of basically everything you can imagine. As far as my scans can tell, the two superstructures are actually attached, which is surprising considering I keep expecting to find plating attached with bonding tape."

"Uh, yeah... What's all that mean?" Julius asked

"It means that through sheer quantity, they made the connection airtight," She responded, closing down her scanner. "And the two are actually firmly attached to each other."

We continued to cross the junk-patched gap, eventually crossing it completely and stepping into the old Separatist ship. Like the station, it was clear that a lot of the damage around the impact had simply been removed and used as scrap plating. There was still plenty of damage, but it was far from the completely crumpled mess one would have expected from two large objects slamming into each other.

We slowly moved deeper into the ship, following a general path towards the heart of the ship. The further from the station we got, the darker the ship became. Soon, the infrequent emergency lights, which were dotted occasionally along the ceiling, were the only source of light.

"Their emergency power must be getting filled by the power core flipping on," Miru said after scanning one of the lights. "These are going to go out in a couple of days judging by how little power they are getting."

"How often is the power core flickering on?" I asked as we continued to walk, peeking around a corner to confirm it was empty before motioning everyone forward. "It hasn't happened again since we got here."

"I don't know," Miru responded. "Racer could probably find out when he connects to the core..."

The droid let out a low warble, confirming he could. His top spun a bit as he stayed within the center of the group, where he was the least likely to get shot. He continued to talk for a moment in audible binary, Miru nodding in understanding.

"He could find out at any main network terminal, but the core would see it coming a mile away."

"Alright, it's fine, definitely not worth it. I was just curious, anyway. If it comes on a lot, that would explain why the second power core on the station was stripped. They would likely need the parts after such a long time running," I explained. "Ahsoka, where are the systems cross-compatible often?"

"That's a bit far out of my expertise," The Togruta responded. "But I would imagine it would be better than nothing."

"It's much easier to start with parts that are slightly wrong than start with nothing," Miru explained. "If the part is the wrong size or the wrong power level, that can be fixed. You can't just clap your hands and make palladium you need to build a fuel catalyzer appear."

I nodded in understanding, turning back to the task at hand. Slowly but surely, we made our way deeper into the ship, keeping quiet and staying out of sight. All of us were on edge, just waiting for the other shoe to drop. Eventually, it did, Miru spotting it a mile away.

"Sensors picking up another horde," Miru said, already stepping back away from the front to stand beside Racer. "Coming from the east!"

She pointed to a hallway that intersected with the one we were walking down, which emerged about twenty feet ahead of ours. My team stepped in front, preparing their weapons as the sound of the approaching wave of droids rose to audible levels slowly. Vaz readied her repeating cannon while Luke and Ahsoka ignited their lightsabers. Thankfully, both of the Force-sensitives stayed behind us, holding their weapons ready should the horde get too close.

Suddenly, the droids were there, crawling, stumbling, and running at us. Wild, inaccurate blaster shots scattered off our armor, slamming into the surfaces around us as we systematically dismantled the droids with our return fire. As we discussed previously, Vaz held back from unloading their weapon until everyone else needed to reload. Then she stepped forward and opened fire, dousing the hoard in a wave of deadly blaster bolts, giving us time to reload.

But the horde just kept coming, eclipsing all previous waves.

I was mid-reload for my blaster pistol, which I had been shooting in my off-hand when I heard Miru scream, strangled with a thump of something heavy impacting metal. Our near-constant firing line faltered for a moment as we turned towards the scream to find Miru had been knocked off her feet, her armor now sporting a shallow, shiny groove along her chest. Standing over her, now with two lightsabers spearing its torso, was a vibroblade-wielding BX commando droid.

With at least twenty more of them sneaking down the hall.

"Focus on the horde!" I shouted, waving the attention of my crew back to the oncoming wave of broken and poorly repaired droids before joining Luke and Ahsoka in facing off the commando droids.

Ahsoka used the Force to shove the already destroyed droid at the second closest, the wreck sparking as it slammed into the wall, the commando droid having dove under it. It continued its dive, rolling closer and swinging its sword up at Luke. The young Jedi skipped back, just barely avoiding the upward swing, counter-attacking with a slash that cut the vibroblade in half. I conjured a sword in my right hand, charging and throwing Lightning Bolt at the now-disarmed droid, which stumbled and collapsed backward, allowing Luke to behead it. We both turned and followed Ahsoka, charging the BX commandos.

We clashed with a pair first, both of them slashing at us with their swords. They seemed to have already learned the lesson of their weapons being destroyed by lightsabers because instead of hacking at Luke and Ahsoka directly, they feigned a swing only to try to lash out with a kick.

Ahsoka saw through the move and hopped over the kick meant to knock her off her feet, while Luke only partially succeeded, turning his body enough to shift it from a solid impact on his stomach to a glancing blow against his side.

Seeing Ahsoka deal with her target, I stepped in to help Luke, slamming another Lightning Bolt into the droid's torso. The blast stunned the dangerous droid long enough for Luke to slice it in half before he gestured to it, launching the bisected droid at its incoming allies. The fight was far from over, however, because even as Ahsoka finished her target off, more droids charged us, jumping, rolling, and bouncing towards us like a metal circus act, armed to the teeth and eager to kill us.

A dual cast blast of Chain Lighting caught three more of them off guard, stumbling them enough for Ahsoka and Luke to behead two of them, the third getting nearly bisected. By now, we had all of their attention, especially me, the droids in the back now precisely shooting at us around their allies. Their shots ping off my armor, forcing Ahsoka to actually deflect one back at the droids.

A trio of the droids tried to use the opportunity to rush us, forcing us to step back, the lethal droids scoring several slashes against me, scoring my armor but not breaking through. They quickly compensate, ganging up on me and trying to hack into the joints and seams of my armor, getting dangerously close with a few of their strikes. Thankfully, with their attention on me, Luke and Ahsoka carve them up in short order. Only one of them was quick enough to attack back, but was still quickly cut down.

With a growl of annoyance, I pushed past my two Jedi allies, catching a vibrosword strike with my own conjured sword, slamming it back, and casting Flames on the rest of the commandos to blind them. I spun, letting vibrosword slide off mine, harmlessly deflected before

spinning and impaling the droid through its chest. I yanked my sword out the side, spraying sparks and oil out of the gash. I watch as Ahsoka slashes another one, finishing it off with a flourish of her second blade, while Luke Force-pushed another pair back, deflecting a trio of blaster bolts. We were just barely holding them back until Miru recovered, grabbed a fallen commando droids blaster, and opened fire, managing to distract the remaining droids long enough to let us overwhelm them.

Not long after we dispatched the final commando droid, the tidal wave of poorly repaired droids stopped, leaving our path almost completely blocked with their broken forms. Meanwhile, my armor was covered in lines where the vibroblades, weapons known for their intense cutting ability, had scraped off the paint and just barely scored the beskar. Even with the armor, I was sore from the beating. Those swords weren't exactly light, and I knew from experience how strong those BXs were. I looked over at Ahsoka, who had a cut along her upper arm, and Luke, who had one on his cheek.

"How...did that... happen?" I asked, catching my breath and using Heal Other to fix their injuries.

"Our lightsabers cut their swords," Luke pointed out. "But the tips were still sharp despite not vibrating."

It took me a second to put together what he said before it clicked that they had been sliced by the ends of the sword they had cut free. I shook my head before focusing my attention on Miru.

"You alright, Miru?" I asked, putting my hand on her shoulder and healing her before she even responded, following it up with Respite.

"Yeah... yeah, I'm okay," She responded, leaning forward and giving me a hug despite both of us wearing armor. "They just came out of nowhere."

I patted her back, comforting her while everyone recovered from the fight. Eventually, when everything was reloaded, and everyone had checked for injuries hidden by adrenaline, we continued pressing forward to the heart of the ship, where the central droid brain was housed.

As we traveled, we were attacked three more times by waves of droids. Each time, the droids got more and more whole, as if the system had been saving the least damaged droids back to protect itself. Still, poorly repaired and mismatched parts were prevalent, they just seemed to work better, rather than the nearly useless combinations we saw in the first horde.

When we finally arrived at the heart of the ship, the central droid brain, we were shocked to find the heavy security door that led inside, already breached, destroyed from the exterior by a massive explosion. The edges of the door peeled inward and were darkened by fire.

"This was a shaped charge," Ahsoka said, running her hand along the damage. "Not damage from the crash."

"How can you tell?" I asked curiously.

"Because an explosion strong enough to do this would normally be massive, but there really isn't any major damage anywhere else," She explained, gesturing to the relatively undamaged area around the door. "So it must have been a specifically designed charge. Probably one made to breach security doors like this one."

After a moment of examining the door, we stepped into the large, normally sealed room. Inside, the destruction only continued. At the center of the room was a massive computer system, with terminals, access ports, and more stationed around it. Half of it was caved in from another explosion, the surrounding systems scarred by fire and shrapnel.

"This... this wasn't done by the crash either," Ahsoka said as we approached the central feature.

The core, which was half destroyed, was surrounded by hundreds of clearly salvage computers, droid heads, and other electronics, all of them roughly wired together, linked up to the core by thousands of wires. It was clear that everything was running, with lights and faint beeping coming from the various pieces of equipment hooked into the central droid brain. Racer slid forward and approached the only seemingly intact console, which was on but flickering.

"Hold up Racer... Miru, do you have any idea what this all is?" I asked, the young Twi'lek walking past us.

She started scanning bits and pieces of the salvaged tech, running her scanner over them, sometimes tapping on the interfaces if they had any. I noted plenty of Republic tech mixed in with Separatist, which I could only assume came from the station. After a few minutes, she stepped back, frowning slightly.

"I think... the droid brain is partially running off of this stuff," She explained, gesturing to everything. "It's horribly done... each piece is barely providing any computing power because their own systems are still running, they are just also running the ship mind as well."

"Why? Why not just wipe everything?" I asked, confused

"Because their restrictions wouldn't allow it," Ahsoka chimed in. "Droids were heavily restricted, and directly modifying the programming was definitely not something they were allowed to do. This... this is already pretty out there for a droid brain to manage."

"So... someone blew up the computer core, maybe before the crash, maybe after," I started. "But it didn't kill the droid brain, just heavily damaged it. It tried to compensate by running on whatever it could get its hands on. What about the hordes?"

Racer whistled and warbled, getting everyone's attention.

"He says that he could tell you all of this if you let him hook in and cut out the droids."

"I assumed he could, I just wanted to make sure it wasn't trapped, or the system wasn't going to overload him if he connected to it," I responded. "This doesn't exactly look like a stable system."

Miru's eyes went wide, and she rushed to the console, scanning it again before examining the results. She let out a sigh of relief and nodded back to me.

"It should be fine. He can use the Scomp at least."

"Alright, Racer, do your thing."

The astromech rolled up to the console and connected in, the screen going black before shifting to a code system as the droid sliced in. Occasionally, the droid would whistle and warble as he learned things, Miru translating as he did. According to the records, the droid mind was damaged by clone soldiers *after* the collision and after the station had been abandoned. The ship had been attempting to repair itself enough to leave the system, its communications and hyperdrive heavily damaged. It attempted to salvage the station by connecting to it and sending droids into the station, but they were repelled and then further sabotaged.

According to Racer, the droid brain turned back on after an unknown amount of time passed. Immediately, it attempted to continue its repair, but its systems were damaged and corrupted, resulting in the poor choices and questionable repair jobs we had witnessed so far. When the slicer droid was done digging through the records, it shut down the remaining droids and completely powered down the ship, leaving us a way back before sealing everything up behind us.

Eventually, we could see about salvaging stuff from the Separatist ship, but for now, it would remain powered down, filled with who knew how many broken, twisted droids.

Once our mission was done, we returned to the power core to check on the Lieutenant and his men and let him know the danger had passed. We then made our way back to the hangar and signaled for the ships to land. The station was safe, so now it was time for the engineers to start their inspections.