

We quickly got the group back in order, during which I began to understand that we might have brought too many people for one strike team. Most of the injuries so far had been because people couldn't get to cover quickly enough because somebody else had already taken the closest cover. We had too many people to keep track of, and it was impossible for Ahsoka and I to cover everyone.

We cleared another two rooms before finally reaching a way down, a double set of stairs and a turbolift that led down to the fourth floor. I turned back to the group to voice my opinion.

"We need to split up."

"We should split up."

I turned to look at Ahsoka, who had turned back to the group just as I had, saying the same thing. With a smile, I gestured for her to take the floor.

"There are too many of us, and we keep getting in each other's way. We wouldn't have this issue in an open battlefield, but space is too limited here, " She said, one of Nevue's crew mouthing an apology to Luke as she said it. "We need to split up so we can act more smoothly."

"What do you suggest?" Nevue added with a raised eyebrow. "As of right now, we only have one target."

"One group heads directly to the target. The other goes back and starts exploring through one of the alternate roots," I said, Ahsoka nodding in agreement. "Clear rooms, lock down some paths, basically just cause noise. Hopefully, it will split their attention between two groups."

"If things get too dangerous, head back to Hangar Base," Ahsoka finished. "No reason for you to play martyr."

"Alright, that's fine enough for us," Nevue said, rubbing the back of his head, his blaster rifle hanging loosely in his hand. "If I'm honest, my team is built for stealing and hit-and-run tactics, not direct combat. I'm pretty sure we were included because Ayme, Lario, and I worked with you before."

We said our goodbyes and traded some gear, specifically half a set of explosives that Ukia had been carrying. Luckily Vaz was familiar enough with the design that she could use them, in case we needed to reduce something to tiny bits. When Nevue finally left, he gave us a lazy salute before jogging after his team, eager to lead them back away from the front lines.

"Alright, let's move," I said, nodding to my crew and giving a thumbs up to Luke. I turned to Ahsoka, only to find her hand on her hip.

"You know," She said, crossing her arms. "I'm supposed to be in charge."

"Uhhh... You are in charge?" I assured her, only to let out a groan when she gave me a look. "Fine, yes, I'm bad at the chain of command. Do you really care?"

"...No, as long as everyone is being professional and your team doesn't start ignoring what I say," She said, a smile on her lips.

I nodded, and she turned back to the stairs, leading the way down to the floor below. Slowly but steadily, we progressed through the facility, working our way through the fourth floor, clearing rooms, and locking down any possible avenues for ambush as best we could now that our slicer was gone. The rooms on the fourth floor were a mix of labs, engineering rooms, and storage, though the storage seemed focused more on parts and materials rather than supplies. We also had to deal with several more droid attacks, including one massive wave of B1s.

The fights were considerably more simple now, with Ahsoka and I in front, focusing on defense while everyone else hammered the droids from behind us. Luke was even getting some much-needed practice standing just behind Ahsoka and me, deflecting the few bolts we missed up into the ceiling. I would occasionally throw out a chain lighting or lightning rune, taking down groups at once when they started to overwhelm us with numbers.

Occasionally, I added a conjured familiar, Flame Atronach, or an archer to bolster our team. They worked great when we were pinned, as I could conjure them up to a hundred feet away, meaning they could attack from a very different angle. Having an on-demand flanking maneuver, even if it was just one "person," was extremely effective. I spoke up after our last battle as we slowly walked over the destroyed droids.

"I wonder if Nevue's team has found any living quarters," I said, driving an Ice Spike through a droid's chest as it struggled to move across the ground. "We haven't seen anything like that, but the base is huge. There would have to be sizable living spaces."

"I say we leave it shut if we find them," Tatnia said, reloading her rifle. "I do not want to know what those look like after what we saw in that break room."

"Yeah... good point," I agreed with a wince, looking back at Ahsoka and Luke. "How do you two feel?"

"I feel fine," Luke said with a shrug, not entirely understanding what I meant.

"The feeling of something about to happen has passed," Ahsoka elaborated, picking up my intent. "The trap has already been sprung."

"Well, that's good, at least," I said, shaking my head. "I was worried we were stumbling into someplace that should be quarantined."

We continued progressing, clearing out the fourth floor and stepping down into the fifth. Suspiciously, the droid attacks became less and less effective, with no B2s in sight and fewer and fewer B1s

"They are either running out or droids," Nal said, dumping a wave of blaster bolts into a trio of droids. "Or holding them back to defend themselves."

"Likely the latter," Ahsoka said, deflecting a red laser blast back at the shooter. "Standard practice is to center the largest force around the commander or CIS assets."

The final trek wasn't a separate floor but rather the last distance to the central control room. It was an artistically designed room, something that was built to look impressive. We entered a downward staircase, which almost immediately opened up into a massive room. As we walked around the exterior, following the winding staircase, we could see a central holoprojector, as well as dozens of workstations around the circumference of the vaguely circular room.

All of them were dark.

As we hesitantly made our way down, eventually stepping down onto the open ground floor, we could clearly see there wasn't a single living person. Five mummified skeletons lay at the workstations, face down on their controls. Three more were strewn around the floor, while two were lying on the holoprojector.

"Well.. that doesn't make any sense..." Julius said, scratching his chin. "Who was talking to us if the command staff is dead?"

"A survivor, maybe? Tatnia suggested. "Are there backup controls somewhere?"

"If there are, they aren't on the map," Ahsoka answered with a frown. "I haven't felt anything living as we walked through either. As far as the Force is concerned, this whole structure has been empty so far."

We walked around the room, trying to turn on long dark consoles, carefully poking around the corpses of long-dead CIS staff. After a few minutes, we found nothing.

"If the base isn't being controlled from here, then let's get into the central core," Ahsoka suggested. "We can deactivate the droids and then investigate the whole facility, top to bottom."

"Ok, sure, how do we get in?" Julius asked, putting a hand on the large blast door that should lead deeper into the bunker, where the central core was. "It's not like it's going to magically open b-"

Julius froze mid-sentence as the entire door shuddered, before a soft grinding noise filled the room, the massive door slowly opening. Julius pulled away, his eyes wide.

"I didn't do that!" He shouted as Tatnia grabbed his arm and pulled him back away from the door.

Together, all of us ran across the room to get cover behind the holo projector. Nal and Vaz ran further, taking cover behind two of the massive pillars that ran around the outside of the circular room, following along the stairs. We peered around our cover, watching the large blast door slowly open, revealing an army of droids. It was two or three times larger than any group we had fought so far, with a worryingly large group of super battle droids. I quickly fully charged an archer and cast him by the stairs, directing him up further up, past Nal to shoot down onto the room.

*"Surrender, the odds of you surviving are negligible,"* The voice on the comms advised. *"You have fought well so far, but you stand no chance against such a numerically superior force!"*

The army stopped, all of them raising their weapons in perfect sync. For a while, no one spoke, all of us holding our breath.

*"Do you surrender?"*

"Of course not!" I shouted back. "You do realize your position is unwinnable? You have limited resources, no reinforcement, and no way to retreat. Even if you take us hostage, which won't happen because I don't see any of us surrendering, our allies will just destroy you."

*"You will surrender!"* The voice said, the speakers crackling. *"It is your only viable option! You must! You must! You m-"*

As whoever was speaking through the intercom started to spiral, I grabbed my last grenade and activated it. I could see Julius and Tatnia doing the same before hurling it over our cover into the army of droids. A moment later, I could see Vaz and Nal throw their own, the explosions rocking the control room just after. Smoke and debris rushed by us, and I hesitantly peeked over the edge of our cover.

A considerable amount of B1s had been blasted to pieces by the explosive barrage, leaving a cadre of B2's and a half dozen unfurled and fully shielded droideka.

Still more than we had faced before.

Neither side hesitated to open fire the second the smoke cleared, a flurry of blaster bolts firing across the room in both directions. The holoprojector in front of us was destroyed almost immediately, as was the majority of the consoles around us. We were getting absolutely hammered, and while the cover was keeping us safe, not only could my crew not return fire, but it was only a matter of time before they came around and drove us out of our protective spots.

With a curse, I stood up from my cover, one hand holding a Greater Ward, the other my DC-17. I ran around the projector, drawing fire and peppering the B2's, even managing to take one down, the droid exploding in a fountain of sparks.

I could see Ahsoka on the other side, mimicking my movements, blocking and dodging laser fire with a determined look in her eye. I pushed into the crater-marked and droid-part-covered space, my armor absorbing a dozen or so shots in the process, my ward failing under strain. Thankfully, I was now close enough to use the individual droids as cover, meaning they couldn't shoot at me without punching through a friendly bot first.

With one hand now free, I cast a Lightning Rune, using a big chunk of magic to do so, managing to land it just between two destroyer droids, both of them getting a half taste of the electrical blast.

I turned in time to see Ahsoka backflip over a B2, blasting it with a force push, sending it sliding across the space and taking out another droideka, the wreck cutting out its legs. By now, my team was returning fire, pummeling the droids and taking down several B2s, which spun to deal with the returned threat. The indecision between the two groups gave Ahsoka and me a chance to deal with the remaining three droideka.

Seeing an opportunity, I conjured a flame atronach, feeling it replace my archer as my singular "intelligent" conjure. I immediately directed it to try and tackle the nearest droideka, the conjured summon sprinting across the gap from behind, passing through the shield barrier effortlessly.

The force of the impact rocked the droideka, just barely lifting it up and over onto its center of gravity. Its shield flickered and failed as it crashed to the ground, letting me hit it with a Lightning Bolt to finish it off.

With its first target down, the atronach stood, and I mentally directed it to its next target, but it crumbled and exploded under the combined fire of the two remaining destroyer droids. Still, it served its purpose, the explosion that followed its destruction distracting the dangerous droids long enough for my magic to regenerate. I cast Lightning Rune again, this time under the closet droid. Even as it detonated and destroyed my target, Ahsoka finished the last B2 and repeated her earlier trick, knocking the last droideka before finishing it off with a backhanded swipe of her white lightsaber.

We stood there for a long moment, looking around, breathing heavily, and searching for our next target. My armor was incredibly close to failing. The fact that it had held through the dozens of grazes and direct hits I had taken since my Greater Ward had failed was just about pure luck.

When no new targets prevented themselves, I slowly stood straight, looking back into the main room.

"Everyone alright?" I called out to my team. "Anyone need healing?"

"We're good boss!" Tatnia called, making her way to us, Vaz and Nal right behind her, Luke and Julius coming around the opposite side.

I noticed Luke looked upset but was doing his best to hide it. Figuring it could keep for now, I focused back on our next objective, turning toward where the army of droids we had just carved through had come from. About twenty meters away, I could see a slight decline, the massive hall disappearing downward.

"So, computer core?" I asked, looking at Ahsoka, who nodded.

"It seems like our best bet."

We gathered together and slowly made our way downward, descending down until we were stopped by a large blast door. This one wasn't nearly as large as the previous one, but still plenty big. I watched Nal tap at the control panel by the entrance, only to turn to me and shake his head.

"Faudi, it's time to surrender!" I called out with a frown. "If you open the door and let us disengage the droids, we won't hurt you. There's nothing left to stop us, but there's no reason you have to drag this on anymore. The hole is deep enough already, no reason to keep digging."

*"I don't understand! I calculated it perfectly! Even made allowances for twice the number of Jedi. How did you beat me?"* He asked desperately. *"Your odds were abysmal. Why did you push! Why did you not accept defeat and allow me my victory!"*

I shook my head and stepped back.

"Luke, Ahsoka, if you'd be so kind..."

The two spent the next five minutes cutting down the door, their lightsabers spitting and sparking as they sliced through the thick metal. When it was done, Ahsoka used the Force to push inward, the red hot and dripping edges of the newly made hole sizzling as the cutaway part fell to the ground with a loud, reverberating slam.

Ahsoka was about to step through, clearly wary of the red-hot sides of the impromptu doorway, but I held her back, using Frostbite to cool the edges rapidly. When we finally climbed inside, we were greeted by a room similar in style to the central computer core we raided from the previous CIS base but on a much larger scale. Everything was clean, and the walls were covered with racks of servers and computers, with a holoprojector sitting in the center of the room.

"Keep your eyes open. Last time we were in one of these, we were ambushed..." I said, all of us watching the room for movement.

Suddenly, the holoprojector, which was currently displaying a map of the base, changed to a hologram of a [Super Tactical droid](#).

"Error, defeat impossible, error. I am Faudi, and my programming is superior to the Super Tactical Droid. I am SUPERIOR!" It shouted, loud enough to leave a ringing in my ear. "It is impossible. Your victory is impossible. This is IMPOSiibbbllleeeee..."

The projected image, which had been moving as it talked, slowed down until it wasn't moving. After a second, the image vanished, leaving the room silent.

"Glad that worked," Luke said from behind us, prompting everyone to turn around.

He was standing beside the collapsed form of a Super Tactical droid, which had obvious modifications to it done to its head. He was also holding a fistful of cords, which he had yanked from the back of the droid's head. Some of the cords had clearly not meant to be removed, and the droid's head sparked, smoke rising from its seams.