

By the time we were done doing our muckraker research, we were well on our way to our pseudo-CIS base. It was only a day-and-a-half-long journey from the station, which was close enough that the base could come in handy. I asked Nal to investigate the idea of making it an emergency meeting point should Station Omega come under attack. Nothing too fancy, just a safe location we could limp to, fix ourselves up, and disappear from, with enough supplies and materials to keep us going should we need to. He seemed to like the idea and promised to look into it.

It did take us a few hours to pull out of the station since the *Chariot* had emptied quite a few things out of its main hold in order to make room for the clone slabs, including the Arrow and a large crate full of parts. Once again, I was confronted by how annoying it would be to move things on and off the *Chariot*, and how much time it would take if we needed to move fast. I wanted us to be able to load almost anything on as quickly as possible without having to worry about space or playing cargo Tetris.

Seeing an opportunity, we went through both of the large cargo crates, doing a more detailed inventory and splitting the contents more evenly. When we were done, both of them were filled with more generalized parts, rather than one containing all the repulsor parts and the other holding all of the life support parts. This meant I was more confident leaving one behind, tucked into the far corner of the hangar. It freed up a good chunk of space in the *Chariots* cargo hold without too much risk.

When we dropped out of hyperspace above the CIS base, we immediately started to descend. I was sitting in the lounge, waiting for us to make landfall so we could start moving everything over to the Starcaller. We had decided that this would be another all-hands-on-deck mission with the entire ground team going. Each of us would need our armor, which unfortunately meant we couldn't take any extra droids with us as most of the spare space in the smuggler's compartments would be taken.

As we descended through the atmosphere, suddenly, the ship shifted and pulled out of its descent, hard enough that we could feel it through the ship's inertial compensator. Calima called out from the cockpit, sounding concerned.

"BOSS! You need to come see this!"

I was already standing from my seat, but her call prompted me to rush forward onto the bridge, leaning on her seat, only to find she was pulling away too hard for me to see what had spooked her.

"There was a ship landed on the landing strip," She explained, pulling the ship up and above the *Intervention*, letting the tougher, more powerful ship go first. I nodded and turned to the comms and sensors display, leaning on the droid's seat.

"Show me," I instructed the droid, who immediately brought up the scans on what had prompted Calima's response.

"No fucking way..."

The scan showed a ship that I was only briefly familiar with but, surprisingly, not from my out-of-context Star Wars knowledge. I had only seen it once in passing, as it whipped by me during our precious metals heist, but it was enough to recognize it easily.

"The fucking commando droids! They escaped!" I shouted, unable to keep the laughter out of my voice. "I can't believe it! Run a scan and contact them, see if they respond."

Immediately, we got a response, though it was only a brief flash of static, which, according to Calima, could be from their comms being damaged.

"Calima, take us in, Comms, tell the *Intervention* in the air with weapons charged. The fact that they managed to survive and make it off the planet is insane enough that I'm struggling to believe it."

"You think it's a trap?" Tatnia asked, having joined us when I started shouting and laughing.

"It could be, and that is a good enough reason to be careful," I responded with a frown. "Calima, have weapons deployed and ready. Tatnia, go tell Racer I want him ready to analyze the commando droids programming from top to bottom."

Both of my crewmates nodded, my second in command leaving the bridge to find our slicer droid. I could see Calima tapping something on her console, and suddenly, all the gunner droids in the bridge shifted as their consoles lit up.

We landed quickly, stepping out of the ship and approaching the other. It was an absolute mess, with damaged and carbonized armor over at least a quarter of its hull. The ventral laser cannon was a slagged mess, and I could see *inside* the ship through a hole in the port side.

"Holy shit..." I said, eyes wide with shock as we approached. "I didn't know ships could get that damaged and still fly."

"Must have been difficult," Nal pointed out before adding. "If they flew here."

As we got closer, I could feel the tension rising in the group, ratcheting up even more as three BX units descended down the boarding ramp. One of them appeared to be partially damaged, missing its left arm, its shoulder blackened from heat exposure.

"Unit BX-01 reporting, Boss," the closest droid said, stepping forward. "Unit BX-05 was lost during the last phase of our mission. Unit BX-04 has received major damage but is still minimally functional. Final phase of our mission... Complete."

"BX-01... well done. You guys really surprised us," I admitted. "However... We need to check you over to make sure you're not compromised since you have been gone for so long. Units 03 and 04, please power down for physical inspection. O1, disarm and allow Racer to connect to your processor. And tell us what happened in more detail."

Without hesitation, the two further back droids powered down, leaning forward slightly, their arms hanging down. BX-01 knelt down, pulling his blaster rifle and vibrosword and tossing them aside. Racer slowly approached and connected to the droid, his head spinning as he analyzed its programming.

As Racer did their work, BX-01 regaled us with his tale, starting with their initial attack. After a minute or so, Racer actually started projecting the commando droids' point of view from his holo projector, letting us watch as well.

It was incredibly, and a bit terrifying, watching the five, then four droids cutting through the compound's security. They dropped from their speeders before they smashed into their targets, which was where BX-03 was destroyed, having dropped smack dab into a stormtrooper patrol. From there, the remaining droids regrouped and infiltrated the hangar, tearing through the security in the process. Once they were on board, they made quick work of whatever crew was on board before taking off, blasting out of the hangar.

Then, watching the droids fly the ship, BX-01 makes an actually impressive play at a ship captain, flying around and wreaking havoc on the base, then on various Imperial assets on the planet. They blew up several Imperial depots, seven Tie fighters, nearly two dozen Imperial air speeders, and several other smaller assets before spotting that we were in trouble and blasting off to help. They made one more run after they pulled our asses out of the fire, then returned to finish off any assets around the compound before finally taking off into space. They were then intercepted there by Gizer's patrol fleet, which managed to get quite a few shots on them, doing significant damage and ultimately destroying BX-05 before they jumped to Lightspeed.

When the "show" ended, we were all stunned, eyes wide and jaws dropped. At some point during our watching, Racer had given the droid what was basically a clean bill of health. As we all slowly recovered from watching the BX-01 droids be badasses, he warbled a question, which Nal translated.

"He is asking if he should wipe his memory."

"...no. We are going to let him develop for a while," I finally said, surprising a few of my crew. "That performance deserves a reward. Giving them a chance to develop a bit sounds like a solid start."

"And the other two?"

"One science experiment at a time," I answered. "BX-01 was really the one who went above and beyond there. Let's give them some time to develop, and if he seems solid, we can keep him at that level. We just need to keep an eye on him."

We spent a few hours going over the droid and the ship they had brought with them. It was honestly shocking that they had managed not only to jump to hyperspace but survive it long enough to pop out here. The fact that they landed was also incredible, seeing that a large portion of the engines and repulsor emitters were heavily damaged as well. Miru kept on shaking her head as she inspected the damage.

"I'll be honest, Boss. This thing is toast. I could fix it, but it would take a while and maybe... fifty or sixty thousand credits, maybe more," she said. "And that's just getting it up and running, back to its baseline. I would just assume we give the Rebellion the location so they can strip it for parts."

"Any reason we shouldn't leave it so we can strip it down for parts?"

"I'm not the biggest fan of Kuat's higher-end ships," she explained with a shrug. "They try and get every little bit of efficiency and power they can from every part, but fine-tuning stuff like that tends to make it much more finicky. Parts fail faster, there's more wear and tear, and they can't take any punishment. But why would they care? They get to brag about their slightly higher stats."

I couldn't help but chuckle at the young engineer's mini-rant, though I definitely agreed with her. Give me an older, chunkier, slightly less powerful version of something, so long as it is dependable. Besides, older model ships tend to be more refined and predictable than new, top-of-the-line, high-tech, high-spec stuff.

"Well, that's fine. Let's just cover it up with some tarps to keep any weather from affecting it," I said, shaking my head. "It sounds like it's not worth it, so we'll probably end up handing it off to the Rebellion. If we need a ship that bad, we can buy it or steal it."

Thankfully, the commando droids had landed their ship in front of the secondary hangar, meaning that they weren't in the way of the *Starcaller*. Didn't even want to think about how we would have moved the broken, heavily damaged ship at that point.

We spent an hour or so loading up the *Starcaller* with some basic supplies, plus all of our gear, before we climbed on board, settling into the various rooms and beds. It was a bit

cramped, as we had learned before, but with Allum staying behind this time to pilot the *Chariot* by himself, nobody had to actually share a bed.

We were finally ready to leave once we had moved all our gear in, including our armor. Calima, with the help of the astromech we assigned to the ship, took off from the old CIS base, and we took to the sky. It was a long jump from where we were to the Lipsec system, so we settled in. I spent most of my time learning magic, adding a whopping four spells to my arsenal. Detect Life, Ice Storm, Fireball, and Night Eye. All of the spells were potent, but none of them had been important to learn. Both Fireball and Ice Storm were powerful spells that could outright kill dozens of enemies at once, but they were also unpredictable, just as likely to catch a friend or an innocent civilian as it was to kill the actual target. Night Eye was pointless when we already owned night vision and had it built into our helmets. Detect Life was extremely useful, but it shone the brightest when you were trying to avoid being spotted, and... we weren't really about that kind of stealth.

I also learned a whole list of small tricks and improvements to my Illusion magic. With any luck, the new level of potency for my Calm spell would make the difference in convincing the Commodore to spill his secrets. The less powerful version worked on a dark Jedi, and that had to count for something.

When we finally dropped out of hyperspace, we still hadn't arrived at the planet. Instead, all three of the ships dropped out together, just on the edge of deep space surrounding the planet. There, the *Intervention* and the *Talos Chariot* would wait for word that our attack was commencing, which would come in the form of the *Starcaller*, who would be hanging around, waiting for our word.

Everyone's timing was a bit tight, making the plan a bit more finicky than I would have liked, but with any luck, we would come out on top. We were counting on the natural and normal hesitation that would come from being ordered to fire on your own allies to cover any gaps in our timing, should it come to that.

Once both of our warships were in position, everyone save Calima climbed into our compartments, the small, sealed spaces closing around us in total darkness. Thankfully, we had learned from the last time, and we all had brought datapads in with us, both for light and entertainment. Their wireless connections were all off, as was their sound, but reading was enough of a distraction to keep me from working myself up into a minor panic.

Once safely sealed inside our smuggler's compartments, the *Starcaller* jumped towards Lipsec, arriving near the plane less than ten minutes later. We were almost immediately intercepted and boarded. Unlike our previous experience, however, this inspection barely lasted for fifteen minutes before we were released to continue to the planet's surface. The ground team remained in our sealed compartments until we had landed, which was when Calima finally signaled for us to come out.

"Guess I shouldn't be surprised that the inspection for a much more remote world was so short," I said, climbing out of the compartment. "How did it go?"

"Fine," Calima responded. "They didn't even pull out scanning devices, just visually inspected everything."

"Gonna regret that," I said with a snort. "Not that it would have helped. How far are we from the mistress's mansion?"

"Not far, had to pay a little extra... to get one closer to the city, though."

I waved off the charge and made my way deeper into the ship, letting the rest of the ground team out. Julius and Tatnia looked a little worse for wear, flushed, and damp, but everyone else seemed to have endured the smuggling trip well.

"Alright, Calima, I need you to rent a speeder, just like on Gizer," I said, getting a nod in response. "Once we have some transport, we can find a bigger transport to steal and stash somewhere. I want to be ready for when the shuttle comes down."