

It took four hours for Racer to spot the frequent fliers settling into the bars around the Imperial base, all of them almost immediately imbibing in alcohol. I couldn't help but smirk as they all showed every sign of being out for a long night.

The *Chariot* was a whirlwind of activity as everyone got prepared. Even Calima, the only one who was staying behind, had plenty to get ready. As quickly as possible, we got dressed and piled into the new shuttle, Miru hopping into the pilot's seat.

With everyone seated and our cargo locked in, Miru pulled the shuttle out of the hangar and flew away from the *Chariot*, heading for a location we had picked out earlier in the day. After about ten minutes of flying, we landed in a mostly empty lot, one that was hidden from view by multiple abandoned buildings.

"Alright, everyone, this is it. Our plan is flexible, but that doesn't mean it's perfect. Let's keep it simple, and if anything goes wrong, make sure you stick together," I said, everyone nodding in agreement as I looked at the cockpit. "Miru, let us know when you're back at the *Chariot* and ready for your part."

"Alright, Boss, good luck!"

I nodded and leaned down, grabbing the shiny stormtrooper helmet beside my feet, quickly pulling it down over my head, and twisting it on securely. The armor wasn't exactly the most comfortable thing to wear, but I wasn't about to let the chance to use the suits we found in the dark blade go to waste. Once my disguise was complete, I looked around. Julius and Tatnia were also pulling on their helmets while Nal and Vaz offloaded the now hovering cargo container we had brought with us. Vaz was dressed in her new armor, looking very impressive.

Once everything and everyone was offloaded, I waved to Miru from outside the shuttle. The young mechanic quickly lifted the shuttle off of the ground and flew away, heading back to the *Chariot*. We waited for several minutes until my comm unit buzzed in the utility belt around my hips.

"I'm ready, boss! Dummy is in position and waiting for my command!" She said excitedly. "It's your turn."

"Alright, Miru, hold tight. It's going to be about ten minutes," I responded before tucking my com back into my belt. "Okay, everyone, we are all set. Nal, Vaz, put on your restraints and let's go."

Nal and Vaz nodded, pulling out their purposely broken restraints and fixing them around their wrist. The cut and modified cuffs wouldn't pass a close inspection, but if it got to that point, it was already too late to play pretend anyway. When Nal and Vaz signaled that they were ready, Julius, Tatnia, and I hefted our standard stormtrooper E-11 blasters and took up position around

them, with Tatnia and I on either side of the two "prisoners" and Julus guiding the crate of "contraband" from behind us.

We exited the secluded and abandoned area, making our way through back alleys and mostly empty streets. It was clear that even with this planet's tiny Imperial presence, people were at least passingly familiar with good old-fashioned Empire justice because anyone we came across immediately looked away from us or turned around and ran away.

It took us just over ten minutes to reach the base, having been dropped off a reasonable distance away, primarily so that we wouldn't immediately be connected to the landing shuttle. The security checkpoint at the front entrance of the base immediately came to attention as we got closer.

"Trooper! What is going on?" Asked a uniformed man as we got within speaking distance. "Who are they, and what is your designation?"

"Trooper TK-421 reporting, sir," I said, standing up at attention, surreptitiously tapping my comm three times to signal Miru. "We apprehended this scum attempting to smuggle weapons aboard a commercial vessel, sir."

"Really? And what were you doing off base, unaccompanied by an Officer?" The man asked. "And where is the rest of your squad? Standard Protocol dictates no less than five Troopers for missions outside control sections of an Imperial planet, who..."

The man trailed off, eyes focused slightly above me. After a moment, his eyes went wide, and he scrambled to reach for a comm unit of his own, pulling it up to his mouth.

"Emergency, emergency! Incoming unknown vehicle, due north! Repeat-"

The air speeder the man had spotted, moving at a pace that was definitely in danger of burning out its repulsorlifts, whipped by the checkpoint building and disappeared over the exterior wall of the military base. While they had no way of knowing, the recently stolen vehicle had spent quite a bit of time inside the *Chariots* hangar bay. The unassuming civilian air speeder was being piloted by a B1 battle droid, nicknamed Dummy, whose processors had been cored out by Miru, leaving it with one final suicide mission. All four back seats, as well as the passenger seat, had been torn out and replaced with five barrels of ship fuel, and the extracted explosive components of the tri-fighter missiles Miru scavenged from the raindrops.

Blasts of laser fire flew out over the city as the base's defenses tried to take the speeder down, each shot going wide. Barely a moment passed after the air speeder disappeared over the wall from our perspective when a massive explosion resonated over us. It was followed by a fireball so massive that we could see the light it cast on the buildings behind us, despite being on the other side of a three or four-meter tall wall.

The lighting inside the checkpoint security room flickered and dimmed before returning to normal, while the officer who had been questioning us looked pale. For a moment he froze, before looking back at us.

"Get inside!" He barked, all of us quickly stepping inside before he slapped his hand on something. The doors behind us slammed shut, sealing us in the military base. "Stow your charge in the cells, then report to your commanding officer!"

He turned back to the few soldiers and staff inside his space, barking orders and seemingly already putting us out of his mind. We left quickly, making our way deeper into the base. Already the compound was buzzing, with dozens and dozens of people rushing back and forth, most of the attention focused on the turbolaser building, which now billowed smoke from a large crater. The B1 had done its job, taking the large, powerful turret out of commission.

We moved as quickly as possible, the chaos giving us ample reason to move fast and not arouse suspicion, though the presence of Nal and Vaz did draw a few eyes. For some distance, we took at least partial cover behind the large garage and warehouse building that ran along one edge of the base. Once the cover of the garage fell behind us, we angled directly towards the ship.

As we got closer to our target, I could see that the boarding ramp was down. With a burst of speed, we quickly closed the final distance, heading under the front of the ship and looking up into it from the base of the main walkway inside. Standing there was a single person, dressed in the basic Imperial navy garb, holding his hat in his hand.

"What's going on out there?" He called. "I was just finishing fixing the commander's climate controls when-"

"The base is under attack," I said, cutting him off and climbing up the bridge to the [first deck](#). "We are commandeering the ship to hold these prisoners until everything is cleared up. What's your name, soldier?"

"Umm I'm T- oh, Uh Ensign Tarsi, Sir," He said, nervously twisting his cap as he looked back down the ramp.

"Right, well sorry about this Ensign Tarsi," I said, before raising my blaster and pulling the trigger, a blue wave of a stun bolt washing over him. "I know how much those things hurt."

Even as the nervous ensign collapsed backward, slumping down to the ground, I turned back to the rest of the crew, pulling out my comm and connected to Miru.

"We are on board, Miru. Your B1 bomb worked perfectly," I said, smiling as I could hear the young genius cheering. "We're start clearing decks soon. I'll get back in contact when we are done."

Another confirmation from the young Twi'lek and I stowed my comm unit, giving the rest of the crew a once over. Vaz and Nal were already out of their fake restraints and were in the process of arming up, while Julius and Tatnia tipped over the cargo crate, letting Racer wheel out of it with a soft whistle.

"Alright, guys, we need a room-by-room sweep. Tatnia, Julius, and Nal, you get the first and [second decks](#). Vaz and Racer, you're with me. We are bum-rushing the [third](#) and [fourth decks](#)," I said, mostly rehashing the already discussed plan. "Give us a thirty-second head start."

When I was done, everyone nodded while I turned to the turbolift, with Racer wheeling in first, Vaz and I stepping in after him. As the doors closed, I summoned my armor around me, marveling at how little energy it took to fully charge it. We stepped out of the turbolift on the third deck and immediately moved forward, Racer following behind and taking cover by a corner while Vaz and I went door to door, checking every single one, clearing a series of six bedrooms, a refresher room, and a lounge, before turning around and rushing back to the turbolift, since the one at the far end of the third floor only went down.

Racer was waiting for us in the turbolift, Vaz and I quickly climbed in as well, tapping the controls and ascending to the fourth deck.

When the turbolift opened, we were immediately greeted by a barrage of blaster fire, three bolts pinging off my armor before I could raise a Steadfast Ward up to start blocking them. Several more bolts ricochet off my projected shield before both Vaz and I opened fire. The small space was lit up by back-and-forth laser fire, before we finally managed to take down the three imperial soldiers who had taken cover inside the bridge lounge. The second the last one went down, I rushed forward, jumping over a corpse and blasting a fifth soldier hidden behind a control system in the next room.

I kept moving, finally opening the door to the main cockpit and stepping in, lining up a shot on whatever commanding officer had been on board. Seeing me line up my shot he reached down to his hip for his blaster, but he was dead long before he could reach it. Unfortunately, as I stepped further into the cockpit, I could see he had accomplished his mission, at least partially, the ship's systems locked down. Thankfully, we had someone who could fix that.

"Racer! It's all clear!" I called back down the hallway, watching as Vaz pushed a body out of the way for the upgraded astromech.

Racer joined me in the cockpit and immediately headed for a scomp link near where the officer had been standing. He linked in quickly, his access plug spinning as he did his own magic. After a few seconds, he turned and used his holoprojector to display a timer, with eight minutes and thirty-five seconds remaining.

"Fuck, longer than I was hoping.... Okay, We will buy you some time," I said before turning to Vaz and nodding back down the hall. "C'mon, we need to get ready in case someone comes poking around."

We quickly made our way back through the ship, double-checking everything was clear as we went, eventually arriving back at the boarding ramp, the other three already there and waiting for us. Julius was nursing a mark on his torso, with melted armor and a burn mark peeking out from behind his hand.

"How did it go?" I asked, walking to my injured crew member and dumping a Healing Hands into him, the younger man sighing in relief.

"Only resistance was in the barracks," Nal explained. "Stormtrooper armor bought us enough time to get in before they opened fire."

"They didn't last long, though. They weren't exactly expecting anything," Tatnia pointed out. "Julius just got unlucky."

"That's why I want some good armor for everyone," I said, finishing off my magicka on the healing. "We weren't fast enough. They managed to lock it down before we arrived. Racer has another seven minutes or so before he can crack the lockdown."

"Interesting, goes against protocol," Nal said. "Officers are supposed to scuttle ships before rebels get their hands on them."

"Let's not look a gift horse in the mouth," I said, rolling my eyes when everyone gave me a weird look for the idiom. "Don't question good fortune. Nal, go up to the top deck and see if you can't get an external view of what's going on, and get ready to fly us out of here. I want to leave the second we can."

The Duros nodded and stepped into the nearby turbolift, disappearing as its doors closed. It took them about a minute to report back that, as far as they could tell, no one was looking our way. We settled in to wait, seconds ticking by extraordinarily slowly. Unfortunately, it wasn't two minutes later that he commed back again.

"A squad of troopers is heading our way," Nal warned, all of us jumping up to our feet. "Thirty seconds!"

All of us moved around, finding cover that gave us a vantage point down the boarding ramp. I motioned for everyone to duck down, just before the six troopers came into view. They paused at the base of the ramp, the first few tilting their heads to see further inside. When they saw nothing suspicious, one of the leading troopers made a gesture and the squad stepped up to come inside. The second I heard their boots hit the ramp, I popped out of my cover, taking aim with my blaster.

"Fire!"

A torrent of blaster bolts fired down the ramp and slapped into troopers. Some of them skimmed off their polished armor, but even more of them drilled in and pierced through. In one short barrage the six troopers were taken down, most of them sliding to the base of the ramp. Just after the last trooper dropped, my comm went off again.

"They heard that, Boss. Most of the smaller turrets swiveled to focus on us," Nal said. "Racer needs two more minutes. More troops incoming."

"Alright, get ready, everyone," I said, looking around. "We have two minutes! I-"

Before I could even finish, a [troop transport](#) swerved around into view about ten meters from the ship, too fast for Nal to warn us about. More stormtroopers poured out of the vehicle, taking cover behind the armored speeder. We opened fire immediately, but our blaster bolts only bounced off harmlessly.

"Dammit, we need to hit that thing before they open up with their cannons!" I said, pointing out the transporter's heavier armaments, only to watch as the dorsal turret swiveled to focus on us.

"EVERYONE GET-"

My orders were cut off by a barrage of blue laser fire, a volley that hammered into the transport speeder. For a second it did nothing, splashing over the armor and leaving small black indents. Then the spray tightened and focused on the domed turret on the top of the speeder, dialing in and hammering the same spot, unloading a barrage that dug into the armor. It glowed, sagged and failed, the blue laser fire punching through the turret, which exploded with enough force to cave in the vehicle's roof.

I turned to see Vaz, hefting a familiar-looking [minigun-esque](#) weapon, a dangerous smile on her lips, and the barrels of her weapon smoking from use. Behind her, I could see Ensign Tarsi, looking extremely conflicted, with his fingers in his ears.

"Huh... looks like we managed to find you your heavy weapon after all," I said, getting a snort from the armored humanoid.