

I stepped into the building through the damaged, pried-open doors, I immediately wincing at the blaring sirens and constant flashing red lights. While we had fully expected the facility to be on alert as we entered, I underestimated how obnoxious and distracting it would be. Still, at least we didn't have to worry about any permanent damage since I could heal that away.

As the team crossed the pried-open doorway, we stepped into some sort of security checkpoint. Along one side were scanners and other equipment, all focused on where we were, with a slightly raised area protected by thick-looking glass on the other. Luckily, the obvious observation room was empty. With any luck, the people who were supposed to be there had run away or evacuated.

With no one to stop us, we lugged the spreader tools into the room and slammed them into the door opposite the entrance, which was also locked shut. With our newfound experience, we managed to pry the door open in half the time the exterior door took. With the path cleared, I went first, stepping into the facility properly.

Once the team was inside, we began exploring the facility, quickly finding that the interior consisted of only a few rooms and hallways, all of which led to a large open warehouse. As we moved quickly but cautiously into the large space, I spun around, scanning the room. Along one side was a large opening, the cargo lane that I recognized from the landing platform running through it. While I couldn't see it, I knew it led to the massive armored entrance we had seen when we landed.

The main floor of the open facility was mostly empty, with a few smaller lifting vehicles, basically sci-fi forklifts, as well as some other tools and equipment strewn about. On the other side of the building, opposite the cargo entrance, were dozens of alcoves. They were stacked two high and built into the structure of the building itself. Each alcove was three or four meters across and just as tall, all of them sealed shut with a mean-looking electric blue energy barrier.

"Alright, start breaking down these shields," I said, gesturing to the closest alcoves. "Anything that's valuable comes with us."

All of us, including the two labor droids, crossed the warehouse floor, heading directly to the alcoves. I picked one at random, stepping closer and examining the barrier, a few stacks of metal ingots visible on the other side. The glowing blue shield shimmered and hummed with energy and would no doubt zap me if I tried to touch it. Even as I looked around, I could see that it was carefully sealed into the alcove, so there was no paneling or access where we could shut it down.

Luckily, we had known about this going in.

While the workers that Rabben interviewed had no way of sneaking in recording devices, they had freely described everything they could remember, including the barriers protecting the metal. According to them, a nearby security station would toggle the barriers on and off as

needed, while watching them through security cameras. Thankfully, the warning let us come prepared.

While Tatnia scanned around the alcove with a handheld device borrowed from Mirus's workshop, Julius handed me a device that our young genius put together. It was a cylinder, about a foot in length and half that wide, with a synthetic rubber seal on one side and a rubber ring on the other. It had wires plating welded around the exterior, looking like a custom-made device.

Except none of that actually did anything.

Since we were doing everything we could to separate this mission from ourselves and from Rabben, I couldn't be seen using magic. So, Miru spent all of the fifteen minutes putting together what was essentially a fancy flash hider. After a few seconds of waiting, Nal pointed out a spot, and I put the cylinder over it and stuck my hand inside.

Then, I cast Chain Lightning.

Between the synthetic rubber and the nature of my own magic, the Destruction dumped all its energy into the wall and the barrier projector just behind it, passing through all the armor and protection that were built into the alcove. The barrier flickered and dimmed before failing completely.

After a quick moment of celebration, we got to work, spending the next five minutes breaking into every first-floor alcove with metal inside. While Tatnia and I worked to open them, the rest of the team stepped into each alcove, examining the stacks of metal.

"This one is electrum, though there is not much," Nal called out. "Worth taking though!"

"Pretty sure this is Rhodium or silver," Julius said, shouting over the alarm. "Should grab it either way!"

"I believe I have found the platinum!" Vaz shouted, excitement leaking into her normally calm voice. "There is a significant amount."

When the alcoves were open, we started moving our prize. Between the labor droids and some equipment we found around the warehouse, we managed to stack all of the ingots onto four separate repulsor carts. When we were done, we requested a count from the droids, who informed us that we had grabbed fifty-five ingots of platinum, thirty-five of gold, twenty-two of electrum, and forty-eight of silvery metal that Julius was pretty sure was rhodium.

Tatnia and I were just about to start looking for ways to get to the second-floor alcoves when suddenly, a blast of red slammed into the floor between Tatnia and me. Both of us jumped to the side, avoiding the next trio of blaster bolts by taking cover behind one of the forklift

speeders. I peeked over the top to see a squad of ten stormtroopers pouring out onto a walkway that ran along the higher levels of the facility. I could see even more coming in behind them.

"Take cover!" I shouted.

Thankfully, most of my team was close enough to cover that by the time the troopers opened fire again, they were safe. Unfortunately, Vaz was stuck in the open for just a moment too long, catching a blast in the leg, the bolt punching through a lightly armored section in her armor. She stumbled and rolled, managing to lay down alongside a rack of equipment, just barely covered. The labor droids were not nearly fast enough and were quickly destroyed, their parts scattered across the floor.

As the blaster fire was focused on the now charred droids, I charged a Chain Lightning in both of my hands, throwing them up at the stormtroopers. The blast caught a handful them, the first of them slamming back against the railings and over the edge, the rest stumbling as electricity sparked through their bodies. Nal and Julius, who were taking cover behind a stack of pallets, popped out of cover and opened fire, soon joined by the rest of us.

The level of accuracy we managed was stunning, with Julius, in particular, taking out six troopers by himself, with every other blast bolt finding a gap in the gleaming white stormtrooper armor. Tania and Nal were just behind Julius in accuracy, while my arrows seemed to have no issue punching through the stormtrooper's white armor, with no need to aim for weak spots.

After killing nearly twenty of the stormtroopers, there was a lull in the battle. I rushed over to Vaz, immediately dumping two Heal Middling Traumas into her leg. She gasped as the pain faded almost completely, her wound sealing closed.

"You lucky. I just learned that a few days ago," I said with a smirk as I helped her up. "C'mon, I want to get out of here before more show up."

The team quickly gathered back up around our loot. Together, we pushed all four of the repulsor carts, heading directly for the same hallway we had entered from. We took it slow, using the stacks of precious metals as cover, worried that a new batch of stormtroopers would try to catch us off guard.

After a minute or so, we managed to make it to the security checkpoint without any resistance. After adjusting the setting on the repulsor cart, we pushed them through the pried-open doors. I nearly groaned in relief when we finally pushed out onto the landing pad, the alarm already fading as we crossed to the large Fire Response Speeder. We crossed the distance to our ride quickly, immediately starting to offload the metal, basically throwing it into the empty cargo spaces we had cleared earlier.

Unsurprisingly, a group of stormtroopers noticed us almost immediately, opening fire with a barrage of red blaster bolts the second they did. Luckily, they were a fair distance away, so no

one was caught in the initial salvo, but we did have to stop loading to take cover. Thankfully, the troopers made a critical error, namely, opening fire before they had any cover for themselves. So when I conjured a Greater Ward and stepped out of cover with Vaz beside me, easily carrying her Z-6 chaingun, a simple sweeping motion killed nearly all of them. A secondary sweep took out the rest.

"Fucking hell," I cursed, shaking my head. "C'mon, we need to get the hell out of here before we need to do that again. I might lose my dinner."

Vaz nodded in agreement, and we quickly got back to work, tossing bricks of valuable metal onto the speeder. A few minutes later, the carts were empty, so we climbed back into the speeder, with Tatnia climbing back into the cockpit. Slowly but surely, she lifted off of the landing pad, turning away from the still-burning complex before gunning it, the speeder lurching forward and away, pushing through the clouds of smoke and out over the city.

For a moment, we were clear, leaving the chaos behind as we entered the third stage of our heist. Then, suddenly, we were no longer alone.

Three [speeders](#), of a model I didn't recognize, all painted Imperial colors, caught up to us, slowing down alongside us. A loudspeaker crackled to life, loud enough that I could hear it from inside my compartment.

"LAND THE VEHICLE!" The pilot demanded. "LAND THE VEHICLE AND PREPARE FOR INSPECTION."

Cursing, I went through our options. It sounded like they weren't sure we had done anything wrong because if they did, they wouldn't have bothered asking for us to land. They just would have shot us down.

"BY IMPERIAL ORDERS, LAND YOUR VEHICLE!"

The pilot shouted again, their patience wearing thin. I cursed again, knowing that if I opened my compartment, I could *probably* take down one of them, if I got lucky with my bow or with a spray of sparks. But once we attacked, we would have the attention of every Imperial asset on the planet, something we desperately wanted to avoid.

"THIS IS YOUR FINAL WARNING! LAND YOUR VEHICLE OR WE WILL OPEN FIRE!"

Cursing loudly, I stood from my seat and reached out for the door controls of my compartment. Before I could activate them, however, the sounds of a much larger vessel worked their way into my capsule. Suddenly, a [ship](#) rocketed over us, going much faster than we were capable of, despite the fact that it was very clearly damaged. It opened fire on the speeders with a ventral quad laser, easily destroying the unshielded vehicles. The ship, trailing

smoke, turned back towards the facility and accelerated. Before I could do anything but watch, my comms lit up.

"We will continue covering your escape, Boss," BX-01 said.

"Holy shit, was that you?" I asked into the comms, watching as the ship raced away.

"Affirmative."

"Well... keep up your distraction for another few minutes, then head for space," I instructed. "We should be landed by then."

"Roger Roger, BX-01 out."

I shook my head as I watched the ship continue to speed away, opening fire on the facility once more before turning and retreating away, cutting down another trio of speeders as it did. It was surprising that they had managed to survive this long, especially considering the instructions had been to attract as much attention as possible. I quickly switched my comms connection to Tatnia while I watched.

"Let's not waste the time they gave us, Nia. Give it some speed to the landing area."

"Yeah... alright."

I could feel the air speeder accelerate, the large emergency vehicle eating up the miles, the city whizzing by under us. After a minute or so, we began to decelerate, slowly coming down to land in the parking lot-type space. Immediately, we jumped out and began unloading the metal ingots into a normal-looking speeder truck, looking no different from the several that had already stopped by the ship berth where the *Starcaller* was located. It took almost five minutes for us to offload all of the metal, and that was with judicious use of the *Respite* spell whenever any of us were tired.

After five minutes of constantly moving around lugging heavy bricks of metal, Julius hopped into the pilot's seat, and the rest of us climbed into the back of the vehicle, nearly collapsing on top of the piles of metal. Julius lifted off of the parking lot and slowly, at a perfectly normal speed, made his way back to the *Starcaller*. It was a long trip compared to what it would have been in an airspeeder, but at this point, we were once again trying to seem unsuspecting so that we didn't compromise the *Starcaller's* cover.

When we finally reached the *Starcaller*, we had recovered enough to start moving the piles of metal from the speeder truck to the ship's cargo bay. With our own repulsor carts and Allum's help the speeder truck was soon empty, so Julius pulled off with it to ditch it somewhere, Tatnia leaving soon after with the rented airspeeder to pick him up and bring him back.

While they were gone, we carefully took every single ingot and transferred them to the various sealed compartments. We even ended up having to use two of the compartments intended for the BXs. A full half hour later, when all the ingots were safely stored, and everyone was back in the ship, we finally let ourselves at least partially relax. Julius suggested a toast to celebrate, but I shook my head vehemently.

"No fucking way," I said. "This mission isn't over until we jump to lightspeed. We will not tempt fate by celebrating early. Unclench, take a deep breath and unwind, but no celebrating."

Vaz, who I knew had a rather low view of superstition from comments made while we were escaping the prison planet, rolled her eyes but ultimately kept quiet.

With the metal stored safely inside the *Starcaller*, we entered the fourth, final, and potentially most nerve-wracking stage of the heist. For the next three days, we stayed inside the ship, waiting for the heat to die down so that we could leave without suspicion. The planet was buzzing with Imperial activity, with TIE fighters flying by almost every fifteen minutes. Even the Star Destroyer lowered its orbit, casting a gigantic shadow over the city and our landing pad. With each passing hour, the tension inside the ship rose.

Even worse was the inspection teams that visited the ship, obviously searching for the thieves. Because we had no way of predicting the visit, we were forced to keep the ship clean of anything that might give the ground team's presence away. Twice, Calima caught the ships carrying stormtroopers and officers on sensors, so we quickly clambered into our smuggling compartments, spending nearly an hour each time sealed inside.

Their visits also meant that I failed to learn Telekinesis *twice* before finally succeeding on the third day.

As cover for just waiting around, Calima got nearly twenty thousand credits worth of food and other supplies delivered to the ship, which was loaded into the cargo bay, filling it almost halfway. The deliveries were spread over the three days we were waiting, and when the last one was done, it was finally time to leave.

For a third, and hopefully last time for a long time, the ground team, plus Allum, climbed back into our compartments, sealing ourselves inside. This time, we were stuck inside for around four hours, as the line to leave was held up due to our attack on the facility. When it was finally our turn, the Imperial Customs inspection almost took two hours. When Calima finally opened my compartment, I let out a long sigh of relief, immediately climbing out despite the pain the light was causing me.

"Alright, now let's have a drink to celebrate," I said, shaking my head. "I can't fucking believe that worked out so well."

I went around the ship and released the rest of my crew, everyone meeting up at the lounge, stuffed into the smaller area. I poured everyone a drink from a bottle I had delivered with the rest of the supplies that filled our cargo hold. We drank, celebrated, and then almost immediately crashed into our rooms, exhaustion finally replacing the stress and tension.