

I only had to wait in the large locker for about thirty minutes before Captain Senita hit the all-hands alarm, the klaxon easily audible through the metal door of my hiding spot. I waited a few minutes past that before pushing the door open and stepping out into the airlock entry space. A quick look around proved I was alone, and I released a long breath in relief. I was pretty confident I could handle just about anything they might have on board with no prep or pause, but there was something to be said about having a second to mentally prepare yourself.

The first thing I did was dual-cast Conjure Fighter Construct, dumping all of my mana into the spell. The [soldier](#), armed with his sword and shield, appeared silently next to me, already prepared for combat.

Mentally, I had him step out ahead of me, my blaster pistol in one hand and my other hand empty, ready to cast a spell.

The [interior of the ship](#) was just as Captain Senita had described. I had entered via the airlock on the port side, and immediately past the small in and outgoing station was the port storage bay. The bay seemed to be mostly empty, which only made me feel more exposed as I rushed across the empty space. I made a beeline for the largest entry and open connection to the central storage bay, my conjured soldier walking ahead by a few feet.

I peeked around the corner of the small connecting hallway, looking into the central storage bay. I looked right, then left just in time to spot a trio of stormtroopers walking down the centerline away from me, patrolling the ship. Rather than let them disappear down another hallway, I charged up a Chainlightning and fired it out at them, the dense blast of shock magic slamming into the nearest trooper before jumping between the others. All three soldiers went down, but since the attack lost power with each jump, the last stormtrooper simply took a knee, struggling against the electricity that had slammed into them. Thankfully, I had already told my conjured soldier to charge. The construct arrived just as the trooper was recovering, thrusting out its sword to expertly punch through the seam around the Imperial soldier's neck.

As the last stormtrooper fell, I advanced, casting detect life as I walked. I could see that most of the people on board, at least the people within range, were sitting at stations or focused on one task or another. There were, however, three more groups of people, two pairs and another group of three, moving around at a decent speed. Realizing that the moving groups were probably more patrolling troopers, I rushed off to find the next one, ambushing them as they entered the starboard storage bay.

This time, the attack wasn't nearly as clean, despite knowing they were coming and having the element of surprise. I managed to take down the first two with arrows, my conjured bow driving a pair of translucent projectiles through the chest and forehead of two troopers. The third target, however, managed to dodge my conjured soldier just long enough to fire off a trio of shots. The construct easily caught them on its shield, but the damage was done, the sound of the shots echoing through the hall. Within seconds, I could hear shouted words of alarm, even as I punched a hole in the last stormtrooper's head.

The last four troopers reacted almost instantly, word of an intruder spreading much faster than I anticipated. I had to assume some sort of alarm had been set off, maybe a comms message between whoever had heard the fight. Either way, both of the remaining pairs made a beeline for my location.

Rather than run away or charge to meet them head-on, I simply waited, watching them get closer with Detect Life. When they stepped around the corner, they immediately opened fire on us, lasting long enough to score a trio of hits before I had dispatched them as well. Once I had confirmed they were dead, I left them where they were, heading back around the ship and systematically stunning any crew I came across. Once I was back in the central storage bay, I made a beeline along the centerline, walking to the bridge. Twice more, I had to stun the crew as they stumbled into me until I finally stepped onto the bridge.

The bridge was surprisingly open and much larger than any other bridge I had been on so far. Immediately in front of the large security door was a holotable, and in front of that was an array of chairs and consoles, which were in front of a long, curving viewport. On either side of the security door were gunner stations, judging by their large displays. All in all, it was an impressive space.

As I stepped onto the bridge, three of the crew stood and immediately fired their blasters at me. Several bolts bounced off of my armor before I raised my pistol and stunned each of them, slowly walking forward towards Captain Senita, who was on the opposite side of the holotable. I raised my pistol and pointed it at them.

"There is no need to do that, pirate," The captain said in a pretty convincing act. "If you spare the crew, I will surrender."

"Good choice, Captain."

The crew seemed to sag at their leader's words, defeat and submission coming a bit easier, seeing that their superior officer had accepted it already. I ordered Senita to send his crew to their rooms and to gather everyone I had already stunned. It took barely ten minutes for all of the crew, including the poor bastard I had shoved into a locker, to be securely sealed inside their quarters. I stood in the center of the ship, with detect life on, watching everyone follow their captain's orders. When they were locked up, I did a full patrol of the ship, giving my team time to complete their side of the mission before eventually returning to the bridge.

My conjured soldier, which had been standing on the bridge menacingly, discouraging anyone from trying anything, snapped and faded into a cloud of dispersing energy as I stepped back onto the bridge.

"Are we clear?" I asked, watching as Captain Senita tapped away at one of the consoles.

"Yes, I have sealed the crew inside their rooms and revoked security clearance from anyone who might attempt to reclaim the ship," He explained. "I am attempting to hail the *Huntress* now."

"No response?"

"No, and our escorts are getting anxious. Too much longer, and they will declare the ship lost and attempt to eliminate it," He responded, shaking his head.

"Do they know we have the *Demanding Fury* as well?"

"No, I delayed the warning long enough for you to stop comms from sending the message," He answered, frowning as he watched the console he was leaning over. After a moment, he sat down on the chair, tapping on the screen a few times. "I'm placating them by taking temporary command and having them move into position with us."

We watched and listened as the Gozanti escorts, *Defiant Gaze* and *Cold Blade*, maneuvered around into a new position with the *Demanding Fury*. It felt like forever, despite it most likely only being a handful of minutes, before the voice of Commodore Distani came through in a broad spectrum comms message.

"*Defiant Gaze* and *Cold Blade*, this is Commodore Distani. Power down your weapons and proceed to make landfall," He said. "The *Huntress* has been boarded, and we have surrendered. Repeat, you are free to leave to the planet's surface as long as you power down your weapons and retreat immediately."

"*Defiant Gaze* and *Cold Blade*, This is Captain Senita. *The Demanding Fury* has also been boarded, and we have surrendered," The Captain added. "You are outmatched. Power down your weapons and retreat to Lipsec's surface."

The response, which only took a few seconds to come in, was a scathing barrage of curses and accusations of treason. Captain Senita listened with a bored look on his face before eventually tapping a button and silencing the call.

"How long until your friends show up?" He asked, turning to look at me with a raised eyebrow.

"Well, the plan was to reach out as soon as the other group claimed the bridge," I said with a shrug. "Your partner should have-"

I stopped myself as the *Intervention* and the *Talos Chariot* dropped out of hyperspace a significant distance away. The *Chariot* immediately scrambled its raindrops, eight ships flying around both of our warships as they slowly approached.

"*Defiant Gaze* and *Cold Blade*, this is your final warning. You are outgunned and outclassed twice over now," Commodore Distani said through the comms, cutting off the other captain's tirade. Do not force us to defend ourselves."

Several long seconds passed, with only silence coming through the comms. Eventually, and without another word, both of the ships pulled out of formation and descended to the surface. As they did, I shook my head.

"I would have really liked to have forced them to surrender as well," I said with a frown.

"There isn't enough time," The captain said, already standing from the comms console, moving to what I was guessing was the pilot's chair. "It would take a while to claim them, and the response time from the nearest fleet is less than thirty minutes. We are already cutting it close."

I nodded and sat down at the comms station, using it to communicate with everyone, get updates on the situation, and explain myself. Both the Vakim and Allum, the latter of which was temporarily piloting the *Chariot*, had quite a few questions since they had no idea we had been trying to take both ships. Thankfully, they quickly put that aside and focused on completing the mission. I was most interested in the reports from Commodore Distani since he knew how my ground team was fairing. According to him, there were no casualties, but there had been a rather close call with an attempted self-destruct of sorts. I cursed and rubbed my face but shook it off after a moment.

No reason to panic over something that was already resolved.

It didn't take long for both of our newly claimed ships to punch in the astronavigation data, and after a quick moment to get into a better position, the four-ship fleet jumped, leaving the Lipsec behind.

We stayed in hyperspace for several hours, jumping deep into deepspace, leaving lightspeed at a random point between systems. I spent that time patrolling the ship, dragging stormtrooper corpses to one of the cargo bays, and watching all of the crew with Detect Life. I had to stop a few of the more determined Imperials from tampering with the doors or attempting to contact their neighbors. Still, after walking into the rooms, stunning everyone, and sealing the room back up several times, they got the message. I was watching, and they had no chance of escape.

When we finally dropped to realspace, I spent a while on the comms, talking to everyone and fully explaining what had happened. Vakim, with her serious and by-the-book-and-plan nature, was the most vocal with how bad of an idea it had been, but the simple fact that it had worked, and well at that, had kept her from being truly annoying. Besides, I knew she was just worried about what could have gone wrong. The rest of the crew was amazed and stunned at the result.

After everything was settled and we confirmed that each ship was fine, we reached out through the hyperwave to say that we had achieved our mission. Our Rebel contact, which we had been given in case we needed Rebel support after completing our mission, had been shocked that we were claiming success so soon. Nevertheless, once we had proven our claims, the Rebels sent out several ships, some to take the prisoners away, whom they promised to treat humanely, and others to assist in scans and studying the ship. We spent a total of two days in deep space, waiting for the ships to arrive and then waiting for them to give the all-clear. At the end of that time, they took the *Huntress* with them to be painted, staffed, and do whatever other things they planned to do before it made its way back to Omega Station. We took the *Demanding Fury*, along with several Rebel volunteers, with us there directly, warning the station and the ships around it that we would be arriving before we jumped.

Both Senita and Distani were with me on the *Demanding Fury* as we dropped out of hyperspace around Omega Base. Neither of them had any idea where we were and were shocked to see our destination. To be fair, so was I, since the activity around the station had nearly doubled. It seemed that the Rebellion had either assumed I would succeed or, more likely, had planned to renegotiate for more control of the station if I failed, because they had clearly dedicated a considerable amount of assets in repairing it. Several ships floated around the Munificent specifically, as well as the damaged primary sensor spire.

"That's... quite a bit more organization that we were told the Rebellion had," Senita admitted. "What is that attached to the side?"

"Technically, the Skyforged Vanguard owns the station. The Rebellion is just fixing it up for us," I explained as we came in to land in the hangar bay we had claimed. "It's one of the reasons we owed them a ship. And that's a Munificent. Don't worry about it."

We landed in our claimed hangar, followed by the *Intervention* and the *Talos Chariot*. The three starships *barely* fit in the hangar together, and the only reason they did at all was due to two of our ships being relatively narrow. Conveniently, Calima had landed the *Starcaller* in a smaller, separate hangar.

Once we had landed, I was swept away in a rush of activity. Both Senita and Distani left the station within hours of landing. They shook our hands, thanked us for dealing fairly with them, and left, their pockets full of several credit chips that contained a lot of credits. Thankfully, the final assessment of the station's supplies had come in, and after a brief meeting with the woman in charge of getting the supplies of the station, we received our payment. Suddenly, the three hundred thousand credits we paid them was only a small portion of our total credit amount of two point eight million credits, now two and a half million.

Part of me had wondered if the pair or ex-imperials would defect and hang around, as it seemed like something that would happen to us, but I wasn't surprised they hadn't. They both clearly did not like the idea of working with the Rebellion, and I wasn't about to try and change their mind.

After seeing them off, mostly to keep an eye on them, and meeting with the head engineer of the repair project, as well as the woman in charge of the supplies, I was immediately contacted by Allum, who had apparently been talking to some of his newly defrosted brothers.

"They contacted me shortly after you left on the *Starcaller*," He explained. "Lieutenant Rider asked permission to come to the station."

"Really? They don't need permission to come here, as long as they don't side with the Empire," I said, shaking my head. "Not hard to argue they have more claim to this place than we do, to be honest."

"Maybe, but they don't see it that way, Sir," Allum assured me as he led me further into the station.

"Alright... well, what does he want?"

"He is asking about joining up, sir," He explained. "And it's not just him."

Before I could ask him to clarify, he led me into a large room, seemingly to be one part lounge, one part cafeteria. As I entered, I froze like a deer in headlights, eyes wide as I looked around the room. As far as I could tell, there were nearly thirty clones seated around the room. As the door slid shut behind me, quite a few of them looked over, including one whom I recognized as Lieutenant Rider by a tattoo along his neck.

"Oh boy," I muttered to myself. "This just got a bit more complicated."