

As the shuttle sealed closed, leaving Deacon behind on the *Demanding Fury*, a silence settled over everyone. The Commodore respectfully stayed quiet, guiding the ship away from the small patrol craft, making a beeline for his own ship, the *Huntress*. After nearly a minute of silence, Nal finally spoke up.

"Boss will be fine," He said after he lifted his blaster pistol from his holster, checking its power pack before sliding it back home. "Between his armor, his magic, and his luck, he will be fine."

"He still shouldn't be going on his own," Tatnia pointed out. "We need to expand the group, especially the ground team."

"Another recruitment drive?" Julius, who was sitting across from her, asked. "Not a bad idea. We, uh... did just come into a lot of space."

"Perhaps we should offer Ahsoka Tano a position," Vaz said, everyone shifting to look at the Shistavanen woman. "She obviously believes in the Rebellion but clearly dislikes being in charge. I could smell it on her."

"I... That's not a bad idea," Tatnia admitted. "But we need numbers too, not just one more spooky sorta-not-really space wizard. Boss having to go off on his own because we couldn't afford to split the team up anymore is not going to fly."

"We can recruit once the mission is done," Nal said. "Now relax, Boss will be fine. We need to focus on our own mission."

Tatnia let out a long, aggrieved sigh, Julius shooting her an apologetic look. The woman shrugged but gave him a smile to show him she was okay.

Silently, the shuttle continued on. Eventually, the Commodore started the process of passcodes, security questions, and digital handshakes again, this time with his own ship. He managed to keep it together, seeming too slowly slide into his role as he got a bit more practice with it.

The process of landing in the small *Huntress's* hangar took a fraction of the time that connecting to the *Demanding Fury's* airlock did, despite the bay's tiny size. Once the shuttle was through the mag field into the pressurized hangar interior, it gently came to a rest on the sleek black, Imperial-style floors.

"Give me twenty minutes," Commodore Distani said as he shut down the shuttle, pausing to straighten his uniform. "I should have the interior security doors disabled by then. That's the only form of security I will be able to disable without the Stormtroopers catching on."

"We know Commodore," Tatnia said, giving him a nod. "Good luck."

The man looked at her, or rather looked at her helmet, before nodding and letting out an energetic breath. He cleared his throat and walked to the back of the shuttle, tapping the control panel and opening the shuttle's back hatch. The ground team was treated to a view of the mag field, the bow of the ship, and space beyond. They could even see the *Demanding Fury*, along with the two Imperial Gozanti's, flying in a loose formation.

With the door open, Nal pulled out his blaster rifle as Julius pulled out his pistols. Nal had his weapon set to stun, while Julius did not. That way, they were prepared for no matter who came around the corner, either an officer or a stormtrooper. Deacon had agreed that they would do their best to spare the officers and crew, and they intended to follow their Boss' words.

Twenty minutes passed at a crawl, but eventually, Racer quietly warbled, and they stood from their seats. Slowly but surely, with Tatnia in the lead, all four of them slowly walked down the entry ramp, coming around the ship with weapons raised.

Once they had left their hiding spot, it didn't take long for someone to notice them. One of the crew, who had been working along the only other thing in the hangar, a set of probe droids, turned to spot them. The younger man shouted, only for Nal to instantly stun him, the crewmember crumpling to the floor before he could even point.

Unfortunately, the damage was done. Three other individuals, all within earshot, turned to the team. One of them immediately ran, escaping into the attached hall through the only access point, a comm device already in their hands. Nal was in the process of stunning the remaining crew when a quartet of stormtroopers, who must have been nearby, charged into the hangar, weapons raised. Without a single hesitation, they opened fire, blaster bolts whipping by the team. Energy bolts slammed into their armor, only to glance off. The response was immediate and much more effective, with Tatnia and Julius opening up with a barrage of blaster fire that immediately took down three of the four stormtroopers. Vaz, who was only armed with her pistol, her rotary cannon still on her back, took down the fourth as he tried to find cover in the hall, backtracking while firing as fast as his blaster would allow.

With the room now clear, all four of them rushed to the doorway, Racer following behind them. As they approached, the door slid open, exposing a wide-eyed and shocked crewmember. He was furiously tapping at the control panel, most likely trying to seal the door, something that was now disabled by Commodore Distani.

Without hesitation, Nal stunned the already frozen-in-fear Imperial, stepping over their now insensate, crumpled form and into the first hallway.

"Alright, the first target is the bridge," Tatnia said, getting a nod from Nal. "We-"

Before she could continue, another eight stormtroopers came cruising around the far end of the hall, turning around the left corner. Nal dropped down and covered the unconscious crewmember with his body while Vaz stepped forward and grabbed her rotary cannon off of her

back. She proceeded to mulch the new hostiles, spraying hundreds of plasma bolts down the hall. When she finally pulled off her trigger and swayed the end of the weapon, smoke curling and swirling around it, the entire hall was still.

Everyone was quiet at the powerful show of lethality, staring down the hall at the very much dead squad of troopers. Eventually, Tatnia broke the moment by stepping forward, continuing from where she left off.

"We don't have much time. I want the bridge captured so that we can bring weapons to bear on both of the Gozantis and-"

She let out an annoyed growl as the ship went into red alert, sirens covering her voice. Luckily, the helmets could compensate and connect with short-range comms. When they linked up, Tatnia stayed silent, leading them by example rather than explaining.

Following directions given to them by Distani, Tatnia led the team through the ship, stunning several more crew and killing another squad of stormtroopers, this time ten of them. After a few wrong turns, they found the central command lift leading upwards to the bridge. They split into two pairs, with Racer, Julius, and Tatnia stepping into one repulsor lift and Vaz and Nal stepping into another.

When the doors opened again, they did so to a decent-sized room. Opposite the repulsor lift was a large door, which, according to Distani's directions, led directly to the bridge. In front of that door were twelve more stormtroopers, all of whom were crouched behind thick metal cover. There were also two large laser turrets coming up from the deck, swiveling slightly as they reacted to the opening doors. The moment the repulsorlift doors opened, the stormtroopers opened fire, releasing a deluge of heated plasma into the small space. The turrets, on the other hand, held their fire because their sensors read nothing to shoot at.

Because the repulsorlifts were empty.

What wasn't empty was the service space below the bridge, a tight, cramped area that barely had room for the team to crouch down in. Not only had Commodore Distani revealed this floor's existence to the team, but he had also given them the access codes. While the team couldn't really get any deeper into the tight space, at least not with their armor on, Racer had no such issues. The smaller droid zipped forward to a control panel, inserted his scomp tool, and began the process of slicing into the leftmost turret. With the codes that Distani gave him, it only took him a few seconds to take control of the turret, spin it around, and target the right one, opening fire immediately. The heavier laser blasts vibrated through the deck, the weapon slagging its partner before turning on the stormtroopers.

By the time Racer disconnected from the controls, the ambush room outside the bridge was devoid of life. The droid spun around and quickly returned to the group, who had already called the repulsorlifts back. A quick ride later, they stepped out into the disaster. The only

surviving turret had pulled back down into the floor, and the squad of twelve stormtroopers lay dead or dying on the floor, sporting massive blaster impacts.

"Well done, Racer," Tatnia said, crossing the room and leading the group to the door opposite the lifts. "You-"

As Tatnia was talking, a stormtrooper shifted, raising their blaster rifle just high enough to shoot over his comrade's corpse. A trio of scarlet blasts of energy fired out, missing Nal and slapping into Racer. The stormtrooper was immediately killed for their efforts, three different weapons firing at him almost at once. Julius, who had been the fastest to react, frowned and turned back to the droid.

"Dammit." He said, reaching out to touch the droid's slightly smoking frame.

"Miru is going to kill us," Tatnia said. "She *just* repainted him."

The droid in question let out a long, mournful whine, his head spinning around as if trying to see his damaged paint. Along his torso were three spots where the blaster bolts had impacted, revealing the droid's latest upgrade, a thin layer of beskar alloy lining his frame. Vaz shook her head, and nodded toward the door, catching Tatnia's attention.

"Right. Time to take the ship."

The crew stepped to the door, which immediately opened to reveal the large bridge. It was a clearly Imperial-style bridge, with a central raised path that led all the way to the front, which was where Commodore Distani was standing in his crisp white uniform. On either side of the raised section were two lowered pits, which was where the control consoles were. Several members of his crew stood and raised their side arms, firing at the team, blaster bolts bouncing off them harmlessly. The return fire was not nearly as useless, stun bolts knocking out everyone indiscriminately,

Within thirty seconds, Commodore Distani and the team were the only ones conscious.

"Right... well I suppose that went well enough..." He said, taking a moment to tear his eyes away from one of his crew. "And I have your word they will be treated humanely?"

"You have the Boss's word, which is good because I would have been much less gentle," Tatnia responded. "You need to call for a surrender before the rest of your crew starts to get ideas."

"Right."

The next ten minutes were a blur as the team secured the rest of the crew. Most of them went easily once Commodore Distani declared their surrender, though they did have to stun

several more. They stored them away in their rooms, sealing them in with Distani's passcodes. Unless one of them secretly had higher clearance than their leader, they were secure for the time being, especially since Commodore Distani could monitor them remotely from the bridge.

When the team was just finishing up securing the remaining crew, their comms crackled to life.

"We have a problem!" Commodore Distani's excited voice called out, getting a wince out of Vaz. "The eight remaining stormtroopers have taken over the main power core and severed the bridge's connection! They are working to overload it! If it works, there won't be enough left of the ship to fill a cup!"

"Fuck!" Tatnia said, borrowing Deacon's favorite curse. "How long do we have?"

"Five-"

Before he could finish another alarm started to blare, replacing the first one, which Commodore Distani had disabled once he had "surrendered".

"Make that four minutes!"

"How do we get to the reactor room?"

"I can get you there, but what if this is a diversion to retake the bridge?" Commodore Distani asked.

"Then it's a bad one, considering if we don't stop the countdown, we all die no matter who has the bridge," Tatnia fired back before growling and shaking her head. "But you're right, we can't take the risk. Nal and Vaz, I want you to head back to the bridge. Distani, direct Julius and me to the core!"

Nal and Vaz nodded and rushed away, heading back through the ship to the bridge, while Commodore Distani directed Julius and Tatnia, Racer following behind them. Thankfully, the power core was in the middle of the ship, meaning that it didn't take them long to arrive. They both skidded around the final corner, the power core room just ahead, at the end of a long corridor. As they came to a stop, Julius immediately dove back around the corner. He just managed to drag Tatnia with him as he went, just before an [E-Web heavy repeater](#) opened up from the other end of the hall, punching holes along the deck and back wall.

"We don't have time for this!" Julius shouted as they both stood up. "Can you make that shot?"

"Not before he gets me," Tatnia responded. "I need to get closer."

"...Okay. I go first, you come in behind me," He said, getting closer to the corner, preparing to run. "When they hit me a few times, I'll hit the deck. Then you jump over me and take the shot."

"What? No, I'm not letting you face down that thing!" She shouted. "You can only take a few shots of something that heavy!"

"A few shots in the same place," He reminded her. "I'll be fine, just take it out before he can focus on me!"

"But-"

"Tatnia, if we don't stop the reactor, we are all dead!" He pointed out, before turning back to the corner. "Now!"

Before she could reach out to stop him, the brash man ran out from the corner, forcing Tatnia to follow behind him. They made it nearly a half dozen meters before the gunner crew zeroed in, stitching a handful of energy bolts across Julius's armor. He went down, tumbling a bit as he did, but Tatnia leaped over him, continuing to run. Several bolts of plasma flew past her, but before they could take her down, she raised her blaster and fired, holding down the trigger and spraying the entire area with red lethal energy. First to fall was the gunner, followed by his second. A third one fell as he tried to take the first gunner's position, and the final one fell as he stood out of cover to try and take her down directly.

Tatnia immediately turned back to Julius, about to run back to him, when she saw he was already standing, his armor looking deformed but apparently still holding strong. Now that it was clear, Racer pulled up from around the corner and blew past Julius, then Tatnia, heading straight for the power core room, whistling and whining the whole way.

By the time Racer got to the central power core control console, sliced in, and once again used Commodore Distani's codes to steamroll the ship's security, they had less than a minute left on the timer. Thankfully, that was more than enough time for the little droid to shut down the power core overload sequence and re-establish control for the bridge.

Tatnia and Julius sagged with relief when the alarms went silent, the latter pulling his helmet off. Tatnia punched his shoulder, but he just smiled.

"Not bad, huh?"

Tatnia pulled off her helmet, her face a scowl. He grabbed the edge of his chest plate and yanked him closer. She very carefully looked over at Racer, confirming he was still focused on the console in front of him.

"You are an idiot," She said, leaning in to kiss him before continuing quietly. "You're lucky you're a handsome idiot."

"Is that all that matters? My dashing good looks?" Julius asked with a smirk. "I mean, I'm not complaining..."

Tatnia rolled her eyes and turned to walk away, leaving the reactor room behind, Racer following behind after a few seconds. Julius chuckled and followed as well, stepping over the cooling stormtrooper corpses as he did.