

Before any of us could really do anything, Nal buzzed me through my comm unit.

"Boss, Racer has completed his slice," He said quickly. "I am taking off immediately. Please send Tatnia up to assist!"

I looked over at Tatnia, who nodded and rushed to the turbo lift without a word. As she disappeared behind the closing doors, I turned to everyone else.

"Get to a turret control room," I said. "It's only a matter of time before-"

The ship rocked, and the sound of a blaster cannon being fired echoed up and in through the now-closing ramp.

"That happens! Go, we need to take those turrets down!"

Vaz and Julius nodded and ran to the closest turret station, which were down the hall from the main cargo hold. I turned to Tarsi and pointed to the turbolift.

"You're with me," I said, getting a nervous nod in response. "Let's go."

We rode the turbo lift I commed Calima, telling her we would be pulling off from the Imperial base shortly. She confirmed she would be ready to follow us up and that the *Chariot* was in the clear as far as she could see. As I hung up the comm and stepped out of the turbolift, our ship rocked again, this time followed by Julius and Vaz returning fire.

"So... why did you help?" I asked as I ran towards the turret control room, passing by the barracks and the small meeting room before finally dropping down into the turret control seat.

The CES gunner station looked plenty different from what was on the *Chariot*, but their obsession with keeping their systems similar and accessible meant I recognized enough to activate the station, swivel the turret I was controlling, and fire a burst of lasers at a turret.

"I... don't know," He admitted. "I... It just felt right."

I fired another blast, even as the ship slowly lifted off the ground, Nal and Tatnia getting us going. The turret I was aiming for exploded, leaving a crater in the roof it had been mounted to. A readout along my left informed me we were down to thirty-five percent shields.

"I'm gonna need a little more than that," I said, looking at him from the corner of my eye. "What kind of feeling?"

"I just... I'm... The thing is... It's a long story," He tried to explain, nervously gripping his cap again. "I didn't join the Empire because I believed in the holovids, you know?"

As I listened, I could see us getting further and further off the ground through my screen, the turrets still firing on us, blasts of energy slamming into our shield and whipping by us. The shields dropped a bit more, but the ineffectual laser fire stopped after about twenty seconds of flying. We kept on putting more distance between us and the base.

"So why did you join then?" I asked as I swiveled the cannon around, now focusing forward.

"I... I like fixing stuff. And my planet sucked. My family sucked," He said, adding the last bit quietly. "I thought I could do my service, learn a bit more about ships, maybe leave and get dropped off somewhere like Coruscant and get a job as a mechanic or something..."

As I listened, the curvature of the watery, ocean-logged planet started to appear. I couldn't resist the urge to shift the view of the turret so I could watch. Eventually, I spotted the *Talos Chariot* cutting out from the atmosphere to meet us. Before they could get close, Nal messaged me again.

"Sensors are picking up the *Guardian*-class ships, Boss, but they are too far away to do any damage before we can jump..." He trailed off, pausing for a moment. "They just deployed their TIE fighters. They will intercept in thirty seconds."

I swiveled my turret view, scanning around momentarily before a ping went off, and the incoming starfighters suddenly lit up on my screen. They read as friendlies to the computer, which was good news for us because they were feeding us telemetry. Vaz, Julius, and I fired at the incoming starfighters, forcing them to juke and dodge, which slowed them down considerably. Vaz even managed to take one out, the shieldless starfighter exploding in a ball of fire.

As the last three remaining TIE fighters got closer, the aft quad laser cannon, which was smaller but much better equipped to handle starfighters, opened fire, slicing into and destroying a second TIE fighter. Then, before anyone else could even react, the *Chariots* raindrops came in screaming around our starboard, catching the last two TIE fighters off guard and completely annihilating them in short order.

The droid starfighters made a lazy loop around us before meeting back up to the *Chariot*, the smaller ship slowing down slightly to let the starfighter connect to their undercarriage. Nal and Tatnia used that to catch up as we put even more distance between us and the planet.

A few moments later, we jumped to lightspeed, leaving the planet behind.

I slumped back in my seat as the targeting screen went blank, the jump to lightspeed automatically locking down the weapon systems. I took a long breath, letting it out after a small pause.

We had done it. We had managed to pull off a pretty impressive heist with minimal issues. There were a few tense moments and some... interesting developments, but that was to be expected. In fact, if I hadn't called the *Chariot* up to leave with us, I doubt it would have been connected to the heist. I didn't regret playing it safe, not when the two *Guardians* could have shown up anywhere. Besides, we were on a timer, so doing anything else would be dangerously overreaching, especially after snagging such an impressive addition to the fleet.

And wasn't that an interesting feeling, knowing that we were now a fleet. Sure, we were a severely understaffed fleet, but we were a fleet nonetheless. Our next task would be finding more crew to staff this ship. I also wanted soldiers, boots-on-the-ground types who could fight with us. I knew the rebellion would provide as many soldiers as we needed, but I wanted at least some working directly for me. I needed to know I had at least some backup if we went our separate ways.

"Umm... you're not going to kill me... are you?" Tarsi asked as I stood from my chair and stretched. "You're rebels, right? Part of the Rebellion? The holovids say you're all savages, but-

"We aren't part of the rebellion quite yet, but that's a bit complicated," I said, shaking my head. "But no, I'm not going to kill you. Not after you helped us out. You haven't told me why you helped us."

"You stunned me," He responded. "You didn't have to, you could have shot me. And you apologized for it."

"Yeah, I know it sucks."

"So... What's going to happen then?" He asked, waiting nervously for me to respond.

"What's going to happen is you're going to behave yourself," I said, pinning him with a stare. "We are on our way somewhere to settle down, go over the ship, and discuss our next step. When we do, we will discuss what happens to you. Most likely, you're gonna get dropped off somewhere in the Rim. Until then, you're going to sit in a room and wait. Understood?"

He nodded near frantically before wordlessly following me back down to the first deck, to one of the larger bedrooms. He stepped inside and sat down on the edge of the bed, before I closed the door with a tap on the control panel. I pulled out my com and connected to Nal.

"Nal, can you look over your shoulder and ask Racer if he could seal the first big bedroom on the first deck? I asked. "Or at least keep track if the door is opened?"

"Sure, Boss."

A few seconds later, the light next to the door went yellow, and blinked twice before going red. I thanked Nal before returning to the main cargo hold, where Vaz and Julius were waiting.

"So, what's his deal?" Julius asked.

"Signed up for the benefits, said it felt like the right thing to do," I answered, shaking my head. "I'm giving him some slack since he helped, but stay on your toes if he decides to try and strangle us with it."

"I do not believe he will," Vaz said, sounding confident. "I believe he wanted to help."

"Random people stealing a ship?" I asked with a raised eyebrow before waving my hand. "It doesn't matter. We can have this conversation later. For now, I want to start cleaning up. I want the bodies in the airlock so we can dump them when we drop out of hyperspace."

Together, the three of us and a Flame Atronach I conjured started cleaning up the bodies. The magick construct was obviously confused at first, but I managed to finagle some directions to get it to carry a body we handed to it, the mostly brainless construct following behind us. Once we had the barracks cleared, we cleared the fourth deck, pausing to talk to Nal and Tatnia.

"Any issues?" I asked as I patted down the officer I had killed earlier, pulling out a small datapad, a comm unit, and a side arm.

"None so far, Boss. The ship is in good condition," Nal responded. "The engineer station down the hall was clean last time we checked."

"Alright, good," I commented with a nod before looking around. "There's a lot more crew stations than the *Chariot*. Way more than I would have expected."

"Imperials like to spread out responsibility," Nal explained. "This ship is also old. Effective, but old."

"Fair enough, I guess," I said with a frown, grabbing the dead Imperial officer and lifting them over my shoulder. "Comm me if anything changes."

With the bodies taken care of, all that was left to do was wait. Rather than just sit around, we passed the time by exploring the ship in a bit more detail, going room by room to check everything out. We had plenty of time, so we started at the first deck, which included the main cargo hold as well as several sleeping quarters. We skipped the one that Tarsi was in.

The cargo hold didn't have any surprises, filled with mostly food and some repair materials, though there wasn't much. I assumed that the close proximity to the planet meant they weren't particularly worried about making major repairs while on patrol.

It was also apparent that most of the non-crew beds were not being used. The forward escape pod, the massive one that made up the cone shape of the fore, was almost entirely unused, as were three of the larger midline rooms. As we searched, we piled up quite a bit of junk, which was carried to the main cargo bay for easy disposal.

The second deck was much more populated and heavily used, revealing quite a few more useful things. There were three more storage rooms, one of which was filled entirely with shelf-stable food rations, another with a few more parts for the ships and misc materials. The workshop was well equipped, with plenty of tools, all in good shape. I was pleasantly surprised to find a [protocol droid](#) and [two repair droids](#) tucked into a room that looked to be specifically for droid storage. All three of them had restraining bolts on them, but I left them depowered anyway.

The finds kept coming as we made our way through the ship, eventually stopping at the barracks. Only four troopers were on board when we attacked, but it looked like six were usually on board when the ship was on patrol. There were six standard sets of stormtrooper armor, as well as their weapons, equipment, and side arms. Between the armor from the *Blade* and what we had just found, we now had eleven sets of stormtrooper armor, though the one Julius used was damaged.

We continued going through the ship, eventually finishing our search by sitting in the bridge lounge, just down the hall from where Nal and Tatnia were keeping an eye on the ship's systems. There, we went over everything we had found, including the total of five hundred credit ingots.

Eventually, we made our way back down to the barracks, mostly because there were empty containers for stormtrooper gear, and I wanted out of the set I was wearing. I had ditched the helmet a while ago, but the rest of the outfit was just as bad. Once I was back down to my civies we decided to crack into the food stores and try the Imperial rations. Vaz had no issue, easily eating hers without complaint, while Julius and I struggled.

"This... they make their own people eat this?" I asked, lifting up a green glob of food with a fork before letting it plop back down. "We are going to have to throw all of the food away. I won't force anyone to have to eat this."

"There may be some specifically for the officers," Vaz pointed out. "We did grab the first ones we could see."

"Idiots," I said, shaking my head. "I would have mutined if I was forced to eat this while the officer was eating good food."

"It's how the world works," Julius said, pausing for a moment before correcting himself. "Well, it's how most of the world works."

I managed to finish about half of the ration, throwing the rest away, Julius quickly following suit. Vaz volunteered to bring food up to Nal and Tatnia, stepping into the aft turbolift and disappearing behind the closed doors. Julius and I continued to familiarize ourselves with the ship before settling back into the lounge. I almost immediately shut down, my body realizing all at once that I had been up for way too long, working way too hard. I barely had enough energy to make my way to one of the empty rooms before I passed out.

Eventually, about seven hours after I had passed out in the comfortable luxury bed, Vaz woke me up and said we were about to drop out of lightspeed. I nodded and quickly headed to the cockpit, arriving just in time to see the light show end and a familiar planet appear before us.

When the decision to steal a ship had been reached, Miru had been very emphatic that she wanted to go over every inch of it herself before we started hiring people to crew it. So, rather than try and do that in space, we agreed that finding someplace to land would be our best bet. After a bit of debating, we settled on the small, unnamed planet with a now empty, stripped-bare, and abandoned CIS base had once been.

"Anything showing up on the scanners?" I asked Tatnia as I leaned on her seat.

"No, the planet is empty," She responded. "Atmosphere still sucks, though, so back to wearing masks outside."

I couldn't help but groan as we watched the *Talos chariot* pull ahead and head down into the planet's atmosphere.