

The three of us slowly made our way down the long halls of the facility, with my armor fully charged. As we walked, I summoned a familiar, letting him run ahead whenever we came to a corner or an intersection. For the first two, nothing happened, but on the third, the "ambush" we were waiting for finally happened.

At an intersection of our hall and another, my familiar turned down the next corridor and was almost instantly destroyed, a half dozen blaster bolts passing through its space in a few seconds, blowing it apart completely. I stopped and put my back against the wall, leaning around the corner for a moment, pulling back to avoid the subsequent barrage.

"Alright, there are six of them," I said, looking back at my companions. "Any ideas?"

"We need to keep moving," Vaz said, turning to watch the corridor behind us. "If we remain in one place, we will be flanked."

"Right, forward and through it is," I said, shaking my head. "Tatnia, follow me in?"

"Right behind you."

I nodded and took a deep breath, mentally double-checking my armor before charging up a dual cast steadfast ward. I stepped out of cover with Tatnia right behind me, holding the shimmering and glowing shield of magic slightly to the side. Tatnia used the extra cover to lean out from behind me and shoot through the ward, something that I admittedly should have tested before I tried. Still, it worked, and the blaster bolts sailed down the hallway to where the guards had set up their ambush.

Her first shot managed to catch one of the guards in the chest before they could even open fire, seemingly stunned by what they were seeing. One of their companions falling backward with a carbonized hole where his heart once was finally shocked them into reacting. Some of them took cover, disappearing behind the metal barriers that had been set up, while the rest stood up and opened fire, shooting down the hall at us.

Several blaster bolts hit my ward, bouncing off and slamming into the walls, sending white sparks flying. Even as my shield failed from the concentrated fire, Tatnia managed to take down two of the three guards who stood and fired at us. The third got one shot in on my bound armor before Vaz took them down, using our diversion to lean around the corner and fire.

During all of this, Tatnia and I kept moving forward, my unprotected crewmate ducking behind me fully when my ward failed. Together we picked up speed, finally reaching the fortified area. I lashed out with a sparks spell in one hand, washing it over two of the guards, causing them to shout and stumble back. Tatnia turned and fired at the remaining guard, dispatching them easily. While my targets were stunned by the sparks, I charged up a lighting bolt, slamming one into each of their chests, turning them into smoking corpses.

I refilled my armor as we caught our breath for a moment or two, Vaz catching up with us as Tatnia grabbed more ammo from one of the downed guards. She tossed one of the energy cells to the Shistavanen, who caught it and quickly exchanged it, loading her blaster rifle with a practiced hand.

"Time to go down?" Tatnia asked, nodding to the nearby doorway, which was marked as a stairwell.

I nodded, and together we made our way to and down the stairs, a summoned familiar once again taking the lead. When we reached the right level and stepped out into a new floor, we immediately ran into two more guards. My familiar managed to take down one cleanly, and Vaz sprinted to do the same to the second. While my tiger familiar tore the throat from its target, Vaz used her claws to slice through hers, seemingly experienced enough to point the resulting arterial spray away from herself.

"Damn... alright, the security office should be this way," I said, orienting myself according to the guard's directions.

It didn't take long for us to arrive at our destination while somehow avoiding any more encounters with the guards. The security office was well-marked, but the door was locked. I cursed under my breath, looking around before shaking my head.

"Alright, let's try-"

"Boss, let me give it a shot," Tatnia said, stepping around me and pushing me back.

As I stepped out of the way, she slid forward, took a deep breath, and slammed her fist against the door. I watched her in surprise, wondering what the hell she was doing when she called out to whoever was inside.

"Sir! We have a problem!" She shouted, sounding a bit panicked and out of breath. "Hello? Sir, can you hear me?"

Nothing happened for a long, slow few seconds. Suddenly the locked door slid open, revealing a crisply uniformed guard. He looked confused, which quickly shifted into shock and fear when Tatnia jammed her blaster rifle up under his chin. He raised his hands immediately, and I stepped closer to disarm him, pulling a blaster pistol from his hip.

"Nice and easy now," Tatnia said, pushing the guard into the security room, Vaz and myself following behind.

The room was a decent size, with one side nearly covered with computers and view screens showing video footage of several different places. Three of the viewscreens were divided into

six camera views, and one of the three showed nothing but static on their divided screens. Along the far wall was a doorway with another on the wall opposite the viewscreens.

"-aren't heading to the exit," One of the guards, a Rodian, said. "They managed to take down the ambush point but didn't make it to the second one... where are they?"

"Doal's squad just reported in, they definitely aren't in their barracks," Another guard, this one human, said. "Sir, who-"

As Tatnia pushed the guard further in, the three guards sitting in front of the security screens finally noticed us. One of them stood quickly, trying to pull his pistol out. I zapped him with sparks before finishing him off with an ice spike, the large ice projectile slamming into the Rodian's chest, knocking him off his feet and to the ground, where he lay, unmoving.

The other two raised their hands in surrender.

"Vaz, find strip them of weapons," I said, the Mandalorian-trained woman nodding, heading to the surrendered guards while I focused on the one sweating on the end of Tatnia's rifle. "And you can lead us to the collar controls."

"Why?" He asked, pale and fighting what was probably a considerable amount of panic. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to throw a party," I said sarcastically, jamming his own pistol into his ribs. "The collar controls?"

He nodded reluctantly, turning and heading to the far doorway, Tatnia and I following behind. He stopped in front of the door's control panel, looking over his shoulder before slumping in defeat and tapping the panel. After entering a password, it blinked green, and the door opened, revealing another smaller room. There was only one computer system inside, and it was currently unmanned.

"C'mon, we have invitations to send," I said, pushing the man into the chair, leveling his blaster against the back of his neck. "I want you to turn off all of the collars at once. Can you unlock them from here?"

"Ye-yes, b-but-"

"But what?"

"They are all unconscious! They won't wake up for a while!" He responded, shouting to get through his fear.

"... can you activate all of the collar's functions from here?" I asked, the man nodding rapidly. "Good. I want you to activate the pain inducers for a split second, just long enough to wake everyone up. Then unlock their collars. Will that work?"

"I... y-yes, that would probably work," He admitted, leaning away from me but not moving otherwise.

I gestured to the controls, and he jolted, turning to the screen and starting to activate the collar system. After going through to confirmation screens, he stopped, looked at me, and winced, pressing a button for a split second before releasing it. Once he released the pain inducer button, he quickly entered another password... and another before finally gaining control.

"Are you-"

Ignoring him, I reached forward and pressed the activation button, the screen flashing a warning before registering that all collars were unlocked and disengaged. He slumped in his chair, giving up. After confirming everything was in order, Tatnia grabbed the guard's shoulder and dragged him out of the room. Once they were through the door, I washed the console down with a stream of sparks, the system immediately going dark as I fried it. I quickly left, sealing the door and destroying the control panel as well.

"Right. One last thing," I said, walking to Tatnia and grabbing the guard's arm, dragging him to the wall of screens. "I want you to delete everything that the cameras have been recording, and then I want you to turn it all off. Can you do that for me?"

This time guard didn't hesitate, quickly sitting down and doing as I asked. I watched as he worked, confirming that he was at least vaguely doing the right things. After a few minutes of tapping and working, the screens started going dark, and the system completely shut down.

"Good job. Now stand back," I warned., waiting for him to get out of the way before hosing the whole wall down with the lightning, watching the computers and screens spark and smoke as I ruined them completely.

I did this twice, emptying my mana completely each time before I was satisfied. I turned to find Vaz securing the last guard with the others, tying them up with their own jackets.

"Alright, that's done. Time to get going," I said. "We are gonna blitz to the exit now, I want to get out before getting caught up in the riot."

"Agreed. I know the way. These guards have been eager to give directions," Vaz explained, and I nodded, gesturing for her to us out.

We made quick progress through the facility, stopping twice, once to hide at a corner and let a squad of guards run by and again to fight a different squad, easily taking them out after getting the jump on them.

It wasn't until we reached one of the final barriers to our freedom that the guards finally put up another challenging fight, clearly having decided to hold the exit at any cost, having set up a heavy blaster cannon of some sort. Without access to magic, I was pretty sure we wouldn't have stood a chance.

As it was, it took me a minute to charge my armor, step out of cover, fire a dual-cast lightning bolt, retaking cover before my armor failed. I was trying to take out the blaster cannon itself, and after a few tries, I eventually managed to nail it. The weapon shot out sparks, its powerful energy source sending out an explosion of smoke and fire, knocking the two guards manning it to the ground.

With the guards distracted and the heavy weapon destroyed, I conjured a fire atronach, sending the construct to rush the reinforced exit, hands raised and dumping fire into the ranks. It lasted long enough to dive over a piece of cover before I detonated it, a gout of flame coming over the metal barrier. With the guards now dealing with more injuries, fire, and the explosion itself, I sent more and more of the constructs until, eventually, I felt confident in charging the exit myself.

Once again, I led the charge, with Tatnia and Vaz behind me this time. I held out a one-handed steadfast ward, firing out ice spikes at any guard who stuck their head up, managing to make it through one of the gaps my atronach had made. We jumped through and made quick work of the surprised guards, finishing off a few of the burned and injured before rushing to the exit.

We stumbled out of the smoke and fire-filled interior to find ourselves in the same garage area Tatnia and I had been brought in through. After a minute of searching, we found a row of land speeders parked in a neat row.

"Personnel parking lot?" I asked as Tatnai pulled out ahead, looking around before making a beeline for a specific craft. "See something you like?"

"I know this model," She said, walking over and looking into the sealed cockpit. "Plus, there is room for all three. Can I have a dagger?"

I quickly summoned a dagger and passed it to her, watching as she used the bound weapon to expertly pop open a panel under the door. She fiddled for a few seconds, cut a wire and connected it somewhere else, a metallic clunk echoing through the vehicle. With a smirk, she pressed a button, and the hatch pulled back, revealing an interior with four total seats.

"Get in. We need to get gone," She said, slapping the panel closed with her palm.

"Really?" I asked sarcastically, climbing into the passenger seat as Vaz climbed into the back. "I figured we could take the scenic route, maybe stop for some food?"

She laughed, the high of the prison break clearly affecting us all. She sat down in the driver's seat, using the dagger to pop open another panel. This one took even less time, the speeder starting up in a few seconds. She made to pass me the dagger, but I dismissed it instead, the blade disappearing in a puff and spark.

Shaking her head, she focused on driving, swinging the speeder out of its parking spot, and making a beeline for the exit. I had to step out and activate the garage bay door, but once it was open, we were free and clear.

Tatnia drove out of the garage, keeping it steady and at a reasonable pace, not wanting to attract any attention if someone happened to be looking. For a while, we were silent, our focus on looking around, trying to spot if anyone was following us or tracking us down. After about five minutes of driving, I let out a long sigh.

"Thank you, my friends," Vaz said, sitting up and focusing on me. "You have given me my freedom."

"We aren't in the clear yet," I reminded her. "We still need to get off the planet."

"It does not matter," she assured me, shaking her head. "I am free when I thought I would never be again. I owe you both my life."

"You were just as important to getting out as we were," I assured her. "For now, let's focus on getting off this rock. We can talk about who owes who what later."

Vaz looked at Tatnia, who laughed and shrugged.

"It's just how he is, you get used to it," She explained. "Or you will if you stick around."

"I would like that."

"Welcome aboard then," I said with a smile and a nod, turning back to watch the road and our destination.