

We dropped out of hyperspace around the time that we were expected to, though, with no electronics on me, it was a bit difficult to judge time. The thrum of the hyperspace engines vanished as we did, replaced by the firing of the main thrusters as Calima oriented us toward the planet.

It was more than a bit nerve-racking, knowing what was supposed to be happening but having no way of knowing if everything was going according to plan. I found myself listening to every click, buzz, and thump that reached my small, pitch-black box, analyzing what they could mean. I spent about ten minutes doing this when an unmistakable shudder ran through the ship. Someone had just connected to the external airlock, docking with the *Starcaller*.

We had hoped that the Imperial Customs presence on Gizer was lax enough that the boarding and inspection wouldn't happen, but either from pure bad luck or Imperial paranoia, that wasn't the case. The next while was spent nervously waiting, resisting the urge to move, breath heavily or anything else that might give me away. Miru had insisted that the compartments were almost entirely soundproof and that any vibrations we gave off would be seen as standard ship stuff, but it was impossible not to be nervous about being caught, especially when in such an inopportune position.

Thankfully, and as usual, Miru turned out to be correct. After a long, tense wait, a similar but less aggressive thump reverberated through the ship, signaling that the boarding party had left. Not long after that, I could feel Calima adjusting the ship's angle and accelerating. It seems that the inspection went well, or at least well enough to let us pass. We were now heading down to the planet's surface.

Eventually, the ship landed and slowly powered down, the engines turning off and the reactor going into low output. I could hear the ship settling around me, heated parts slowly starting to cool down, including the hull of the ship. After a few minutes of listening to the clicking of cooling parts, the seal on my compartment broke. Bright, blinding light blasted me in the face as the compartment opened, revealing the dark outline of Calima.

"How we doing?" I asked, nearly blind as I pulled myself out of the box, wincing and partially covering my eyes. "Any issues?"

"Everything went well, Boss," Calima answered. "They didn't... find anything suspicious as far as I could tell."

"Good, great. You keep an eye out for emergency inspections. I'll go let everyone else out."

Calima nodded and turned back to the cockpit, sitting down and tapping on her console, opening up what looked like a sensor screen. I turned and headed through the ship, opening up everyone's compartments. Only Tatnia had their own compartment like me, with Allum, Julus,

Vaz, and Nal divided between two large compartments. Once everyone was free and had adjusted to the lights again, we all met down in the cargo hold.

“Alright, as far as Calima could tell, the inspection went off without a hitch, which means they have no idea we are here,” I explained, smirking as Julius cheered. “Yeah, yeah, settle down. This is only the first step. We have a lot more work to do before we are ready.”

Despite my declaration of having a lot to do, the very first step in our plan was to wait. Rather than kick things off immediately, I wanted the first modification to the *Starcaller* to be underway before we started moving around. That way, we had the added cover of hardware delivery and repair droids moving around. It took the rest of Gizer’s day cycle for Calima to organize a delivery of what we wanted as well as an airspeeder rental. That night, we took turns keeping watch, one of us awake and keeping an eye on sensors at all times to keep from being taken off guard by a surprise inspection.

The next morning, the Airspeeder was dropped off, and the materials for the first upgrade were delivered. I had always liked the idea of a built-in security system, specifically one like the Millennium Falcon had concealed in its ventral hull. Having access to antipersonnel blasters that could cover people as they climbed onto the ship or unloaded cargo sounded well worth the investment. Unfortunately, since the whole purpose of the *Starcaller* was to keep this part of the mission clean, it had to be a civilian version. That basically meant we were restricted to low-powered or stun weapons, barely better than training blasters. Thankfully, Miru assured me she would fix that once we were done here.

Once the materials arrived, we deployed Leddy and three other repair bots, all borrowed from the *Chariot* and the *Intervention*. They started work on the upgrades with instructions to take their time. We had a second upgrade option if we needed it, but there was no reason to get that started unless we needed a whole bunch of extra time.

Once our cover was set and we were relatively certain we weren't being watched, Nal, Vaz, and Tatnia all left on the rented airspeeder, with Calima as their pilot. They were tasked with securing us some stolen speeders. While they were gone, Allum took Calima's place on the sensor watch, keeping an eye out for surprise inspections.

I knew at this point we were being paranoid and over the top, but I was determined to do our best to keep this mission from being connected to the *Starcaller* or back to Rabben. It made everything a bit more frustrating and time-consuming, but it was well worth it as far as we were concerned. Adding as many layers of obfuscation as possible was vital.

It ended up taking us two days to get everything ready, sneaking around after dark, scouting locations, and gathering what we needed. By the time we were finally done, we had intentionally flipped around our sleep schedule so that we were wide awake and ready to go very late at night. We waited for Leddy and her team to finish installing the security blasters,

which only took a day past our prep. By then, we were more than ready to get the heist underway.

That night, everyone was focused, preparing their gear and going through their checks. We were all wearing simple black masks and had colored our armor solid black. Once we were done, Calima began ferrying us into place, dropping us off at a pre-scouted location, a pair of abandoned buildings.

The ground team, as well as two labor droids, sat in one abandoned building, waiting for Calima to get some distance between us. After a few minutes of waiting, I walked across the street to the other abandoned building. We had specifically chosen these two buildings, not only because they were abandoned but because there was a large space between them and the rest of the buildings around them.

Over the course of ten minutes, I cleared the building for the second time, ensuring it was completely empty. When I was certain I was alone, I systematically set it on fire with my Flames spell. It didn't long for the fire to start ripping through the three-story building, sending up flames and smoke. When it was clear the fire would continue on its own, I ran back across the street to wait.

Thankfully, we didn't have to wait long, as a fire response speeder soon showed up to respond to the flames. It landed in the street, and a dozen droids clambered out of it, deploying various hoses and sprayers, starting to put the fire out as quickly as possible.

"Alright, guys... this is the start," I said, looking over the whole group. "Anyone got any last-minute doubts?"

When no one said anything, I nodded and stepped out of the cover building, my crew right behind me. The droid response team had already made significant progress putting the fire out, as well as wetting the area to keep it from spreading. Confident that the fire wouldn't spread out of control, we approached the large airspeeder.

While Tatnia made a beeline for the cockpit, Nal and I walked around the ship, quickly dispatching the droid crew. Vaz and Julius began stripping out everything that the ship had in storage. When the last of the droids were destroyed, Nal and I helped, quickly stripping out hoses, equipment, and any superfluous in the droid compartments. We very intentionally kept a pair of specialized pieces of equipment for later. When we were done, there was a surprising amount of room, which was exactly what we had been banking on. With our space cleared, I walked around to the front of the large, brightly painted airspeeder to the cockpit. Tatnia was inside, getting familiar with the controls.

"Can you fly it?" I asked, looking up slightly at her.

“Yeah, it's a pretty basic system,” She responded with a nod. “Don't expect crazy maneuvers, but I can get us there.”

“Alright, good.”

I made my way around the vehicle, giving the area one last check before directing everyone to get the labor droids into the ship before climbing in ourselves, each of us picking a spot previously occupied by a droid. Thankfully, the spaces were clearly designed to host organic or machine, which meant we had a place to sit and buckle in. Once we had a chance to sit and get secure, I called out to Tatnia.

“All set!”

The airspeeder thrummed, and slowly we lifted off the ground, doors sealing shut around us. Once we were high above the street, we started drifting over the still-burning building. For a moment, I was concerned that Tatnia had lost control of the vehicle, before the bottom speeder opened up. Hundreds of gallons of fire retarding liquid, which was definitely not water, poured out from the newly opened storage tank. The fire below us let out an almighty hiss as it was almost instantly doused, the liquid doing its job and strangling out the flames.

“Nice job!” I called out to Tatnia, though I had no way of knowing if she could hear me.

The speeder lifted off higher before making a beeline for our target. With our transport and disguise secured, it was time to call in the next stage of the plan. I pulled out my comms unit and contacted our support, BX-01 through 05.

“BX-01, we have our ride,” I said clearly. “Time for you to shine. Good luck.”

“Roger Roger, engaging now.”

A significant distance away, I knew that the five commando droids were standing on a parking structure, with ten recently stolen and modified airspeeders around them. They would each be climbing into one of the speeders and activate their programming, a simple command system that Miru put together during her downtime.

The airspeeders would take off from their position and fly in vague formation, as low to the ground as they could, all targeted on the handoff facility. The first five would slam into the wall and turrets of the facility, spreading destruction and chaos. The remaining five, each of which held a BX unit, would pass over the wall and drop down low enough to let the BX jump out safely. Once the BXs were gone, they would complete their own mission of slamming into the barracks, two hardened defensive positions, and a series of fuel tanks.

Unfortunately, while I knew that's what was *supposed* to be happening, I had no way of knowing if it was working. All I could do was sit in silence as Tatnia flew us across the city,

waiting for BX-01 to contact me. Tatnia was going purposely slow, giving the BXs time to complete their mission. Finally, after a few minutes, my comms unit crackled to life.

“Stage one successful,” The robotic voice reported. “Unit BX-02 destroyed. Moving to the hangar.”

While the loss of BX-02 was unfortunate, the truth was that their entire mission was basically suicide. They were our distraction, with the chances of them surviving very low. Now that they were inside the walls of the facility, it was time for them to be as annoying as possible while preparing to drag the empire's attention as far from the facility as possible. By the time they contacted me again, we could see the orange fires of their attack.

“Hangar contained a ship as predicted,” BX-01 reported again. “We have successfully commandeered the vessel, taking off now.”

In the distance, the glowing orange facility brightened slightly before a ship, no bigger than the *Starcaller*, lifted up from the hangar. It unloaded several streaks of light, slamming into the remaining turrets that had opened fire on it, missiles detonating and obliterating whole chunks of the facility. For a moment, the ship paused in the air, laying down heavy blaster fire at the complex below. Before we could get close enough to make out just what kind of ship the BXs had stolen through the smoke and flame, a trio of TIE fighters screeched across the sky, firing blasts of green laser fire at it.

The ship seemed to tank the shots with relative ease but still pulled away and streaked across the city in the exact opposite direction as us. The TIE's immediately gave chase, blasting at the ship and screaming after it.

Tatnia clearly understood that that was our cue, as the speeder slowly picked up speed, heading directly for the burning facility. She pressed a button, and the emergency lights flicked on, as did a long, droning siren.

As we approached the facility, we finally got a good look at the destruction the BXs had wrought. Portions of the complex's walls were in shambles, and almost all of the defensive turrets had been destroyed. There were half a dozen burning wrecks strewn across the open portions of the complex, as well as a few burning buildings. The communication tower, in particular, was a melted pile of slag.

Two other fire response speeders were already approaching the area, one landing by a partially collapsed structure and the other flying above the burning barracks.

Of course, we had our own target.

Tatnia slowly landed alongside the main facility, a large, armored structure. There was a large spot designated for cargo ships, and Tatnia guided the airship down as close as possible to the large sealed entrance.

We all poured out of the airspeeder the second we touched down, including Tatnia. As quickly as we could, we headed directly for the massive security door, which was sealed shut. Alongside it, however, was a normal door. It was also clearly overbuilt and armored, but that wouldn't be a problem. Rather than fuck around and do anything fancy, I put my hands up to the door and dumped my entire mana pool into it, a Sparks spell crackling into the door. By the time I was drained, smoke was pouring from the door's seams. I then stepped back, letting Nal and Vaz step in. They slammed two large devices on the door, the same devices that Nal and I had saved. They were both overbuilt prying machines that were, as far as I could tell, the Star Wars equivalent of [spreaders](#).

The machine jaws slowly spread open, their tips jammed into the door's seam. They slipped a few times but eventually managed to grab on. The door crunched and shuddered as the two spreaders overpowered the door internals. Suddenly, there was a snap as whatever locking mechanism the doors used gave way. From there, we were able to push the door open completely, using the door frame and the spreaders.

"Let's go, people. Every minute we waste is another minute they have to figure out what the fuck is going on," I said, conjuring a Greater Ward out in front of myself. "The BXs can only distract them for so long."