

Within ten minutes, the power core was up and running. We couldn't hear it, of course, given how far away we were, but with some help from Racer, who had stayed behind at the hangar, we were able to direct the energy from the power core directly to the life support and artificial gravity. Unfortunately, my hopes of getting a detailed scan of the interior were crushed. It turns out Lieutenant Soran knew what he was talking about because Racer quickly ran into some issues while trying to run a scan of the interior of the station. Between the damage to the station and a startlingly efficient division of internal security, Racer would need to find a security station to access the station's internal sensors.

As the lights flickered on and artificial gravity began to pull us down to the floor, we decided the best bet we had at the moment was to return to the hangar and regroup. Once there, we could come up with a plan to address the Munificent, as well as the energy reading coming from deeper into the station.

The return journey was thankfully turning out to be much easier than our original excursion. Between the return of gravity and light, and having already been through the same path before, we were making quick work of the trip. Unfortunately, nothing was simple, and I soon noticed something was off.

"Does... does anyone else hear that?" I asked, turning back down a separate hallway as we crossed a four-way intersection of halls. "My mic is picking something up... but its not coming through very well..."

Miru stepped forward before I could stop her and held up her arm, the projected information bumping up and down like music levels on an editing program. She nodded quickly, stepping back behind me.

"Yeah, something is coming. Either something big or lots for little things," she confirmed, shrugging when I looked at her. "What? A powerful mic can be used to detect damage to internal parts. The detection program was a cheap afterthought."

I shook my head and gestured for Tatnia and Julius to come forward, both of them settling in next to me, their blasters drawn and ready, confident in their new armor. Luke was right behind me in his fragile EVA suit, lightsaber already in hand. I could practically feel his desire to be more proactive, to step ahead of us and help, but the life support system was still working on making the station livable. If his suit was breached, the cold alone would kill him in a few minutes.

Before we could say or do much else to prepare, the source of the noise finally came into view. The grinding, thumping, and snapping had been getting louder and louder before suddenly, a wave of twisted robotic limbs, parts, and weapons came around the corner and into the hall, coming right for us.

Immediately, several dozen droids opened fire on us, blaster bolts whipping by us, a few even hitting our new shiny armor, bouncing off and slamming into the floor, ceiling, or walls of the hallway.

“What the fuck is-?” I started to ask, even as I charged a double-handed Chain Lightning and threw it down the hall, slamming into the first dozen or so droids, all of them collapsing. “What’s wrong with them?”

The droids walked, hobbled, and stumbled towards us, looking everything like robotic zombies. They were made of poorly repaired battle droids, service droids, and everything in between. I could see parts of B1s and B2s slammed together seemingly randomly, mixed in with protocol, repair and other droid parts, all trying to get to us. I spotted a B2 torso with all B1 limbs, the thin legs struggling to carry the heavy, armored torso. More than one of the horrible combinations was forced to crawl on all fours, raising an arm or firing from a fifth limb welded to their back.

There were even a few stranger combinations, with protocol droids, medical droids, and even astromechs smashed together to create something barely functional. All of them were dripping grease and oil, and all of them seemed to be determined to reach us, some of them even screeching as they spotted us, a robotic shout of triumph at finding their target. More often than not, the shout cut out quickly as we destroyed them, only to be replaced by several more. What might have been funny, or at least amusing, quickly became unnerving and downright scary as the tide just kept coming. We killed them by the hundreds, my spells wiping out dozens of them at a time, only to be replaced with more and more droids.

Then, as suddenly as it started, the wave of droids ended, leaving the long hallway filled with seizing, smoking wrecks stacked on each other. After nearly twenty minutes of just barely holding back the tide of robotic abominations, the hallway was silent.

“Miru... you got an estimate how many droids we just killed?” I asked, looking back at the only one among us who hadn’t been concentrating on destroying the horde of broken, twisted droids.

“Three or four hundred,” She responded. “Closer to four than three.”

“Jesus... Anyone hit? Any injuries? How did the armor hold?” I asked, looking at the rest of my team, both the members of the Skyforged, Luke, and the others.

“No injuries, sir,” One of the rebels answered. “We took cover, and most of the fire was directed at you.”

“Good, that’s part of the point,”

“My instincts hate just standing out in the open,” Julius said, running an armored hand over his chest plate. “I got hit a dozen times, but never in the same place.”

“According to Pola, the armor should be fine with that,” I said as I looked down at the various streaks that marked impact points on my own armor. “As long as you're not hit four or five times in the same place or two times by something particularly powerful.”

“We just became battlefield juggernauts,” Tatnia said, her voice filled with wonder even if I couldn't see her face.

“Hell of a mission to test them on,” I said before patting Tatnia's back. “And don't think we are invincible. Still plenty of ways to kill us. Now come on, I want to get back to the hangar.”

I commed back to Ahsoka as we slid back into our old path, a new urgency driving us forward. She confirmed they hadn't seen anything, which made me think that the horde of droids had been looking for them, the ones who turned back on the power, and we had just happened to get in the way.

“Fuck... I just realized we can't go back,” I said, stopping in a random hallway just as we passed by what looked like a small cafeteria or break room. “We need to set up and guard the power core. Even on the off chance that that is their target, we can't risk it. Having a functional power core could make or break the reconstruction plans.”

“What about the third power core?” Tatnia asked. “That could still work...”

“Rather not bet on maybe,” I responded, knowing she was just playing devil's advocate. “We need to discuss our options and figure out our plan. But protecting the power core is our first priority.”

I connected to Ahsoka and warned her of the change of plans, and directed her and the rest of my crew to join us before we adjusted our course to head directly to the now-running core. We stopped outside the large security doors of the power core room, setting up an impromptu defensive position. We dragged some crates and old furniture into position for the engineers to hide behind. We barely had a minute to breathe after our preparation when Miru picked up another incoming horde.

This time, rather than appearing down the end of a long hallway, giving us plenty of time to wipe them out, the wave of misrepaired, broken robots came around a corner much closer to us. We struggled for ten minutes to hold off the hoard, the twisted metal shamblers almost reaching our temporary holding position. I had a conjured sword in my hand and a conjured fighter next to me, ready to hold them back in a melee; when Vaz, Nal, and Ahsoka arrived, the former two opened fire from a different angle. Vaz's Z-6 cannon swept through the horde, hundreds of bolts tearing through them, pushing the reinforcements back and letting us deal with those that had gotten a bit too close for comfort.

Just as before, after another ten minutes of wiping out hundreds of droids, the reinforcements stopped, leaving us breathing heavily, looking out over a hall filled with the broken husk of twisted droids.

“What the hells is going on here?” Tatnia asked, slapping a new power pack into her rifle.

“I don’t know, but I have a feeling we are going to have to find out,” I said, shaking my head as Vaz, Nal, and Ahsoka joined us. “How is the hangar?”

“Soran’s men have it locked down. We deployed all of your droids, including the five BX commandos,” She explained. “Allum and Pola even deployed your airspeeder so someone could use its turret and fire down the main entrance.”

“Alright, that’s good, then we don’t have to worry about them,” I said with a nod. “That just means...”

“Getting to the Munificent and stopping whatever is sending all these droids,” Ahsoka finished for me. “You realize they carry over a hundred thousand droids for ground assaults, right?”

“... no, I did not know that,” I admitted. “But they are clearly not in the best shape, and they won’t be able to field all of those at once inside the cramped quarters of the station and the ship.”

“I’ll give you that,” She agreed. “We are going to have to move fast then, otherwise we will get swarmed. Getting attacked on two sides at once will split our firepower. We probably won’t last much longer after that.”

“Uh... this is just a thought... but why not attack from the outside?” Luke suggested, looking over at me. “You guys have a shuttle, right? We have EVA suits, so why not just attack from the hull?”

“Because I was hoping to keep the attention on us, keeping it off of the power core,” I explained. “If we are pushing them back, then guarding this area gets a whole lot easier. We would have to split up as it is to keep this place defended.”

“Lack the firepower to split us up and make a push to the ship,” Nal pointed out. “Barely held back droid tide before.”

“He’s not wrong, Boss,” Tatnia agreed. “They come from the wrong angle, and it won’t matter how much armor we have, They will take us down with sheer numbers.”

We were quiet for a moment, trying to crack through our predicament. After a bit of thinking, Ahsoka and I both nodded.

"We have too many places to protect," I said.

"We need to abandon the hangar bay," Ahsoka said, speaking at the same time I did.

I couldn't help but chuckle at our similar thoughts. This was the second time that it had happened, which wasn't a lot, but it was funny that it had happened twice. I made a gesture for her to continue, getting an appreciative look in return.

"If we have the ships pull out of the hangar, we can move the Lieutenant Soran and his troops, as well as your droids here," Ahsoka explained as I nodded in agreement. "They can defend the power core while we push forward to the ship."

"What is our target?" I asked. "You know these ships better than I do."

"The bridge, the backup bridge, or the primary droid brain," Ahsoka answered. "Any of those three should be able to issue new commands to the rest of the droids."

"Well, the bridge was wrecked by the collision," I pointed out. "So that leaves the backup bridge or the primary droid brain. Any preference?"

"... Droid brain," Ahsoka responded after a brief pause. "That feels like the right answer."

"Good enough for me," I said with a nod. "Let's get everyone moved around. The sooner we can stop the incoming hordes, the better."

After a bit of discussion, it was decided that Ahsoka would remain at the power core, as would the rest of the team, while Luke and I guided the engineers and the few droids we had with us back to the hangar. Once there, we quickly explained the situation, and the engineers climbed into the *Intervention* while we loaded up the *Arrow*. Once both of the ships left, Luke and I guided the eight rebel soldiers and our droid backup back to the power core. We arrived not long later, just in time to watch the rest of the crew finish off a third wave. The broken remnants of nearly five hundred droids filled two corridors now.

"Damn... they are gonna have to take alternate routes soon, or they might jam up the corridor," I said, turning to Lieutenant Soran. "You guys need to be ready for that."

"We will be, sir," He assured me, two of his people already setting up a heavy repeating blaster, hooking it up to a power back, and setting it on a tripod. "With the bots, we should be able to hold off for a while."

"Alright, Lieutenant, may the Force be with you," I said with a nod, giving him a lackadaisical salute, before turning to the rest of my crew, plus Ahsoka and Luke. "You guys ready?"

A series of nods and we were off, following the basic plans that Miru had on her fancy arm computer and sensor scanning system. I made a note to ask if we could get something similar put into the arms of our armor, something simple to display info and scan basic stuff.

We made good progress, especially now that both Luke and Ashoka could take off their EVA suits. They still had them, of course, stored in small packs they were carrying on their backs, the helmets hooked to the bottom. No way they were going anywhere without them, not when we didn't know how stable the station was. Not long after we passed the stripped-down power core, Luke called for us to stop.

“Should we be following that?” He asked, calling our attention to the floor.

Sure enough, the floor was stained with the same black grease and oil that dripped off of the cobbled-together droids. It crossed our current path, going past us, and if my guess was correct, would intersect where we first fought them. The other direction passed us and hooked a right out of sight.

“... Depends. Are we still trying to keep the heat off of the power core and Lieutenant's team?” I asked, looking back down the oily path. “Because if we follow that, we are bound to run into another group if they have one coming.”

“We need to move fast; we can't stop to fight every wave that comes up,” Tatnia pointed out. “And they have nearly twice the firepower we do. They may not have our armor, but they can handle a few waves.”

“I agree,” Ahsoka said. “Lieutenant Soran will comm if they cannot keep up.”

“Alright. Good question though, Luke,” I said, the young Force-sensitive nodding. “Let's get moving then, no more taking it slow.”

We continued our trek through the station, crossing the remaining distance in only ten. As we got closer, the damages from the crash became more and more apparent, with twisted, broken doorways, bent paneling, and cracked ceilings. The atmosphere held, but Miru started testing each door we reached to make sure it had breathable air on the other side. Several times we were forced to down or up a floor to bypass damage.

When we finally arrived at the Munificent, the shift was obvious. On one side was the relatively clean, white, and grey of the Firestar station, and on the other, you had the darker greys, blacks, and blues of the Separatist Fleet. In between both of those, you had some of the worst looking repairs I had ever seen. A wild mismatch of plating, armor, and other metal attached the ship to the station. It looked insane and chaotic. As much as I hated to bring the thought into this world, it looked like it was done by 40k Orcs.

And we were about to cross it into a CIS ship.

I resisted the urge to cross my fingers.