

Two days after I finished learning my new Restoration spell, 1st Fleet was sent out again, this time chasing down a report of potential separatist assets from our data core. Before we set out, Sheora warned us that the information we got from the core wasn't the strongest link to potential assets, and in fact, there was a pretty big chance we wouldn't find anything. Despite the large chance that we were wasting our time, there was enough of a reason to investigate, so we headed out.

Feeling confident from my previous success, I decided to once again learn a master-level spell, immediately settling on a Destruction spell. My options were three massive AOE spells and three focused beam spells. In all honesty, I would probably never bother learning the AOE spells, as they were nearly useless to me. They took too long to cast and would absolutely affect everyone around me. Even if I found myself in the middle of a crowd, had time to cast, and actually wanted everyone around me dead, there were other spells that I could use that were more realistic and took less magicka. Between that and the time investment, they went down at the very bottom of my list.

The beam spells, on the other hand, were *very* interesting. There was one for every element of magicka, and each one seemed extremely potent. The fire spell, Fiery Ray, sounded more like a plasma lance than an actual flame spell, and would no doubt punch through a not insignificant amount of armor. Meanwhile, the Arc Cannon, the shock spell, sounded like it would absolutely take down and disable a large ship if I could hit it. Glacial Beam, the obvious Frost beam spell, would likely be powerful and very useful for slowing down and disabling large groups. Unfortunately, for direct combat, I found that Frost spells were most useful in firing projectiles, rather than freezing energy. After some internal debate, I settled on Arc Cannon first, as I already knew all of the tricks and shortcuts for shock magic, while my fire spells were lagging behind in that aspect.

I would probably end up learning all three at some point, as they all seemed useful, even the Glacial Beam.

Spell selected, I spent another long day learning the complicated, master level spell. After that, I spent another day recovering, coming out the other side of the two-day ordeal just in time to arrive at our destination.

Deep in the Outer Rim, our data core noted a massive production planet where CIS forces made everything from droids and starfighters to larger starships and stations. Sadly, the core did not mention anything about it being a secret. In fact, a quick check on the Holonet showed its location was a matter of public record. That made it extremely unlikely that it escaped the Empire's cleanup of the dormant Separatist forces. Still, for a planet so covered by production facilities, factories, ship berths, and mines, it was well worth a look.

We arrived at the edges of the system, ready and wary of any dangers that might be waiting. Thankfully, however, as we ran our first scans inward, we saw no activity.

"Alright, let's get a close look at this production planet," I commented, nodding towards the *Hope's* second in command. "Bring us in slow, keep the scans going."

While they directed the ship, I stayed by the holoprojector as it displayed all of the fleet's sensor data pooled together. As we approached the planet, tiny dots started to light up around it, though nothing with any power worth noting by the sensors.

"Any idea what we are looking at?" I asked, turning back to look at Ahsoka, who had joined me on the bridge.

"It... looks like a debris field," she responded, stepping forward to look closer. "It's encompassing the whole planet..."

"Well, nothing is active, so let's pull up closer."

Successive scans as we got closer and closer revealed that Ahsoka was right, that the cloud of debris around the planet was, in fact, a debris field. An even closer examination revealed that it was basically trash and scrap from whatever production this planet saw. As we started to scan deeper, to the planet's surface below, we found that the atmosphere was pretty messed up, though not naturally. It was technically breathable, but anyone doing so without a heavy filter was absolutely going to start regretting their life choices. It seemed as if the CIS had essentially ruined a planet, which admittedly wasn't very nice to begin with, to pump their quantity versus quality strategy.

When our orbital scans didn't turn up anything, we had the smaller ships and three squadrons of Heavy ARCs descend into the atmosphere to conduct scans at much closer range. They swooped down, sending data from the planet's surface back to us, so we could view them on the holoprojector.

"Fucking hell...They really didn't fuck around," I said, watching another massive hole disappear from view as the *Loyal Hound* passed over it. "The entire surface is fucked. Each one of those holes was from a [Core](#) ship, something like the center of a Lucrehulk. Each one could contain a massive factory."

"The planet is almost devoid of easily extracted metals," Tatnia commented, looking up from a datapad. "They drained it dry. How did the CIS not win if they had the ability to produce things at this level?"

"Because they weren't supposed to," I said, still watching the feed. "The poorly maintained B1s, the lack of production for more powerful units, and the promotion of lacking captains through nepotism. Sure, they had Count Dooku, General Grievous, and a few others, but as a whole, they were being significantly stunted. They were little more than tools, a means to an end. In all honesty..."

I trailed off, looking over the rest of the bridge, making sure no one was close enough to hear. When I confirmed there wasn't, I continued, though I was speaking much quieter. I trusted my crew, but some things just shouldn't be passed around casually.

"Honesty, a self-producing robot army, one that mines, builds, and expands on its own...There isn't much you could do against one, save maybe start your own." I explained, with

a wince. "The only really way to beat something like that is to find the leadership and take control of them... or pull a miracle out of your ass. Otherwise, it will just continue to grow, spreading into unexplored cracks of the galaxy. An unending army, stripping whole systems."

Both Ahsoka and Tatnia considered what I said, and both of them paled when they realized how correct I was. A Von Bueren-style, self-propagating army, dropped off in some random metal-heavy star system in the Outer Rim could destabilize the power of the entire galaxy in only a dozen or so years.

Of course, as potent as it was, I could never use it to our benefit, because god forbid someone copies us. The concept never occurred naturally in this universe, at least not on a large scale, so that meant the only real source of it could be me, and I wasn't willing to divulge it, considering how much damage it could do.

I was nervous enough about introducing the concept of pure kinetic warfare, given how often we crashed things into other things to break them. All it took was one idiot to connect the dots, and the Death Star would be replaced by an asteroid with a few engines attached to it, and everyone would be able to afford them.

I had to quell my own shiver at that thought, refocusing my attention back to the holoprojector. As I did, I was just in time to spot a slight flash of color, a grey among a sea of earth and rock, as the *Loyal Hound* passed a naturally formed canyon.

"Whoa, did anyone else see that?" I asked, looking down at the controls for the projector. "Can we rewind this thing..."

After a quick lesson in holoprojector controls, Tatnia, who had also seen the flash of color, and I worked the feed back, freezing it just as it became visible. It was something running between the canyon walls. The image was blurry, but it was definitely there.

"That looks an awful lot like a metal tube," I said, tilting my head, as if that would help.

"Is it a pipe?" Tatnia asked.

"Hard to judge the size from this angle...but it looks bigger than a pipe," I responded, before turning towards the bridge. "Comms! Get the *Loyal Hound* to back track until they fly over a large canyon, and to get a better look inside."

The comms officers confirmed the order, contacted the smaller ship, and had it turn around. Not long after, we watched as the ship lowered itself down on the edge of the canyon, landing beside it so that Corvak and his men could get a closer look. Comms patched in their contacts and helmets feeds into our holoprojector, so we could watch and listen as they worked.

Corvak led his men to the canyon edge, carefully looking over the side. After a brief moment of searching, they spotted what Tatnia and I had seen.

"Doesn't look like any pipe I've seen," I said with a frown, shaking my head. "Okay, get some other ships in the area, scanning for any abnormalities."

After some debating, Corvak and one of his team used their repulsor packs to leap off into the canyon and slowly descend, landing on the thick metal tube. It turned out to be even larger than we thought, a massive, vaguely cylindrical structure punching through both sides of the canyon. After looking at the results from a handheld scanner, whose feed looked like a cross between an ultrasound and a thermal camera, Ahsoka finally recognized it.

"It's a corridor!" She said. "They are standing on the exterior shell of an underground hallway."

"Huh... yeah, okay, I can see that," I agreed with a nod, finally seeing the pattern in the scan. "Maybe something to connect two production facilities or a connection to a mine?"

"I have no idea, but it's definitely a corridor."

We started discussing what our options were, but very quickly, I gave up doing so from the ship. I passed the command to my second and quickly made my way to the hangar, with Tatnia and Ahsoka following after. The whole team, including Racer, was there waiting for us when we arrived, and we quickly rode the *Brick* down to the surface. We landed about five minutes later, stepping out to walk to the canyon, armored, armed, and ready.

"Got bored?" Covak asked as I slapped his shoulder in greeting, both of us making our way to the sheer cliff.

"Pretty much," I admitted with a shrug. "Besides, can't let you have all the fun."

Jumping back down to the bridging hallway, we conducted several more scans with more detailed devices. When we finally agreed that there wasn't anything dangerous inside, and that we wouldn't cut anything vital, Ahsoka jumped down and sliced into the top with her lightsabers. I quickly cooled the edges with a bit of Frostbite before all three of us jumped inside.

The inside of the bridging hallway was dark, but it was absolutely a hallway. Wide enough for three people to stand side by side with their arms out, it looked like the interior of a starship, though that could have just been due to the CIS aesthetic. With a hole to the outside, our helmets easily compensated for the low light, allowing us to peer deeper into the tunnel in both directions.

"Okay... not exactly thrilled with the dark, creepy underground hallway," I admitted, casting magelight down the hallway, watching as it continued on, eventually passing two open hallways and several doors before hitting the wall of a T-intersection. "Dibs on that way, I guess."

"Then we will head this way," Corvak said, gesturing towards the opposite direction.

"Sure. Updates every ten minutes."

The rest of the crew, as well as the rest of Corvak's people, landed on the exterior of the hallway bridge and dropped inside one at a time. Once everyone was there, we split up, heading down the predetermined hallways.

Walking along the corridor, it was clear that this place, whatever it was, was completely out of power. None of the doors worked, which was usually where the emergency power kept running the longest. We could have started cutting them open, but despite the place clearly being abandoned, I wasn't quite ready to start shredding the doors. Instead, I sent a message to the *Loyal Hound* to relay to the *Hope*. I wanted them to start mobilizing some of our portable generators down to the surface. With any luck, once we got some mine power into them, we could slice into the door controls and start checking what was inside some of the rooms.

Meanwhile, we could continue walking the halls.

It didn't take long for us to confirm that it was a CIS facility, though I hadn't really expected it to be anything else. Within just a few minutes of walking, we spotted a collapsed group of B1s, the robots having shut down while they were walking down the corridor. I had no idea what they were doing, but the fact that they were here was encouraging.

"Whatever this place is, the Empire missed it while they were clearing the planet," Tatnia pointed out. "They would have absolutely taken these with them."

"Probably would have blown the place up as well," I added, kicking one of the droids over to see the front. "Palpatine wanted to be very thorough in clearing out the CIS army. Wouldn't want anyone remembering that people could put up a fight."

After checking the droids for anything interesting, we continued to explore the tunnels, moving slowly to keep from stumbling into anything dangerous. After just over half an hour, Corvak contacted us through the comms.

"Boss, we found several long-dead bodies, and what looks to be some sort of control hub," he explained. "Not sure what it's for, but putting some power into it might give us a clue about what we are wandering around in."

"Alright, sounds like a plan. We will make our way back to the bridging hallway, cause I'm pretty sure we are just walking around in circles," I admitted with a frown. "We will pick up a generator and bring it with us, send someone back to the bridge to show us the way."

"Copy that."

"Alright, looks like Corvak's team has the luck today, they found something interesting," I explained, before turning around and looking back the way we came, noting a split within ten feet. "Has anyone been paying attention to where we were going?"

My crew looked around, sharing looks and shrugs. I couldn't help but snort and shake my head.

"Thank god I have Clairvoyance," I said, casting the previously mentioned spell and following the trail. "I would not have been happy if we had a genre shift."

Most of my team didn't quite get my joke, and as I led them out the back the way we had come, I refused to elaborate. Thankfully, with clairvoyance guiding us, it took a fraction of

the time to get back as it had to get lost in the first place. Just under five minutes later, we arrived at the bridge, settling down to wait for our guide to find us.