

After we arrived back at the entry point, we waited for several minutes for Corvak's second-in-command. By the time he arrived, several generators had been brought down to the surface of the planet from the *Hope*. After that, Commander Frost and his men carefully lowered them down into the canyon, threading the needle into the corridor. Once Corvak's second-in-command arrived to escort us, we took a pair of generators with us, pushing them along on repulsor carts.

Eventually, we arrived at the hub that Corvak had found. The Mandalorians had spread out some self-powered lamps to light up the area, but it was still too dark to get a good sense of where we were, beyond it being a hub with control consoles. They had also carefully moved the bodies, which were desiccated and dried out, to one corner of the room.

"Any ideas?" I asked my crew, frowning, as I tapped the dark screen of one of the consoles. "Look familiar to anyone?"

Unfortunately, no one could identify the panels, which meant it was time to try powering them up. After a few minutes of work, Racer and Corvak's slicer droid were able to patch in the power generators while isolating them from the rest of the facility. A moment later, the hub lights flickered on.

The room was about fifty feet wide and shaped like a half-circle, with four connecting hallways, all equally spaced along the curve. Once they were lit up, we immediately noticed that all of the consoles were pointing in the same direction, towards the flat wall, making the curved wall the back of the room. The front of the room had thick paneling raised from the wall, only reaching about two-thirds of the way down to the floor before stopping.

"Are those screens?" I asked, walking around the slowly blinking, powering-up consoles to tap the raised paneling.

"It looks more like armor to me," Tatnia stated.

Racer, who had already started tapping into the now-powered systems, let out a loud, triumphant whistle, and suddenly the panels shuddered. Tatnia and I both took a step back, both of us reaching for our weapons, though I put my hand on my sword while Tatnia reached her blaster. As the panels began to rise, we stopped, watching as they revealed a wall of windows.

The window showed nothing but a deep, uncompromised expanse of darkness, where the light from the room barely even penetrated.

"That's not eerie at all..." Julius said as he approached the windows. "It's worse than swimming when you can't see the bottom.

"Yeah... not argument there," I admitted, before reaching over to one of the many lamps set up around the room. "Let's see if there are any sharks."

I clicked the lamp from ambient light to beam mode, then placed it against the window, with light shining through. At first, it was nothing but darkness, but as I scanned around, moving

the beam left and right, I finally caught a glimpse of the edge of something. It wasn't anything special, just a distinct grey expanses of metal. Even with all the lamps pointing forward, there wasn't nearly enough light to figure out what it was beyond big.

"Okay, we need more light," I said, shaking my head. "Racer, any hints at what this is?"

Racer's dome spun around, beeping and whistling, sounding confused but confident. I caught maybe one out of five words of the rapid-fire [Binary](#), but thankfully Nal could translate.

"This is the environmental controls and life support for the facility, and whatever is in there," the Duros explained, nodding towards the windows. "It's big, but none of the consoles know what's inside."

"Can he find a power core?" I asked. "This is going to take a hell of a lot more time unless we can find some real power for this facility."

The droid was silent for a while before he whistled happily and pulled his scomp link out of the console he had linked up to. After whistling a jaunty tune, he rolled out of the hub, leaving through the hallway opposite the one we had come in from. We all watched him scoot on by, while I looked at Nal with a raised eyebrow."

"I'm guessing that was a yes?" I asked, before moving to follow the capable droid, even as Nal nodded in confirmation.

Racer led the way through various corridors, turning down several new hallways, as well as going down three sets of stairs. When we finally stopped, we had entered into another large room, this one familiar. My crew had gained a decent amount of experience with CIS power systems through our exploration of CIS bases and ships, so one of their more power core systems was easily identifiable.

It also meant that we had people on hand who could help us get them jump-started. Though, unfortunately, that meant getting more people down to it.

Over the next hour, the number of people walking around the facility tripled. Racer was our primary guide, with the other slicer droid remaining at the hub, ready to slice into the systems to prevent anything from going wrong once the facility was rebooted.

Within two hours, the power core was ready for a cold start, and the engineers were back at the hub, with Corvak's men watching over them. Meanwhile, my crew was still at the power core, ready to kick things off. The engineers were pretty sure that turning the power on wouldn't restart the collapsed droids spread throughout the facility, but I didn't want people wandering around, potentially isolated from our exit if they suddenly did.

The power core cold start began with a rather ominous grinding noise, but thankfully, it seemed to pass quickly. The core quickly spun up and began feeding power to the rest of the facility, with the lights slowly clicking on, giving us a much better view of the room.

"Okay, no one is messaging us in a panic as the droids wake up, so I'm gonna assume they are still playing dead," I said, poking my head out into the hallway. "Let's-"

I froze as my comms beeped. I cursed under my breath for jinxing myself before quickly activating the comms in my helmet.

"Boss," Corvak's voice cut in immediately. "The lights inside the dark area are on. You... you're going to want to see this for yourself."

"Alright," I responded, now even more intrigued. "On my way."

I led the team out of the power core room, explaining what Corvak had said on the way, following a Clairvoyance spell all the way back so that we could run, rather than following slowly behind Racer. When we arrived, most of the people in the room were looking out of the large windows. As we made our way over, I spotted why Corvak had insisted I see it for myself.

The space on the other side of the glass was *significantly* larger than I had anticipated, large enough that if it had been empty, I likely would have struggled to make sense of the scale. Thankfully, however, I knew exactly what I was looking at, which made judging its size significantly easier.

"That's a [Diamond-Class cruiser](#)," I said with a frown, peering out the window for a better angle. "Well, it's the half-built shell of a cruiser. What the hell is it doing underground?"

Corvak's slicing droid let out a string of whistles, beeps, and clicks, which Nal quickly translated for us.

"With the power back, they can push a bit deeper into the systems," He explained. "It's a ship berth. That ship was being built in there."

Looking around, at the walls, catwalks, and more, I slowly realized that the droid was correct. The ship was obviously not completed yet, but I could see parts in waiting, as well as familiar construction droids and more, all powered down.

"Are you telling me we just found an actual shipyard?" I asked, turning to look at. "A CIS, probably heavy automated shipyard, which *produces* heavily automated CIS ships?"

"It... it looks like it," Tatnia said, her helmet still pressed against the glass. "What are the chances that it still works?"

"We are sure as hell gonna find out," I said, before switching on my comms and linking to the *Hope*.

The next few days passed in a blur of activity. I immediately reached out to Nirn and contacted Miru. I told her to gather everyone she could spare without drastically slowing down production, and hop on board the next fleet that came home. Luckily for us, 2nd Fleet was already there, which meant that we could quickly organize the excursion.

While we were waiting for our specialists and engineers to arrive, we explored the rest of the underground facility, mapping it out and making sure there were no threats. Most of our ships landed around the site, with shuttles traveling to and from the *Hope* as we set up a sort of operating base in and around the CIS facility. While we were clearing rooms, our slicer droids were sifting through every bit of data inside the memory banks, slicing through security codes and learning everything we could about the facility.

As far as we could tell, all of the dead sentients had starved to death, or possibly suffocated when the life support system powered down due to a lack of fuel. It was hard to tell exactly, but we could figure out why they didn't just leave, as well as why the Empire didn't notice the facility. The main entrance was covered in a thick cave-in, too heavy to clear, possibly caused by the nearby production facilities being scoured from the face of the planet. Meanwhile, the ship berth exited from the side of a cliff and was recessed into a natural canyon entrance. Flying past it, even with powerful sensors going, it was completely plausible to miss it.

A combination of being stuck inside and being smart enough to realize they should stay quiet while the Empire was on location kept the facility from being discovered. Essentially, it was a mix of good luck for us, but poor luck for the people who had been stuck inside.

Eventually, the 2nd Fleet arrived, and several dozen of our top engineers and computer experts arrived with them. They descended on the facility like eager children, rushing through the halls excitedly. Miru, who was an eager child, happily set to work as well, sifting through the info the slicer droids had compiled. Within a day, she had a comprehensive report for us on just what exactly we found. At that point, most people who couldn't help troubleshoot the facility's problems had returned to their ships. Miru presented her report for us on the *Hope*, in one of their many briefing rooms.

"So, first things first, the facility *is* a ship berth capable of constructing ships," the genius Twi'lek said, quickly waving off any premature celebrations. "Unfortunately, a lot of the other news is all over the good news, bad news spectrum."

She tapped a few buttons on a datapad, and the room's holoprojector lit up, displaying a wireframe model of the facility.

"First off, the facility is capable of a high level of automation. Plenty of construction droids, purpose-built machinery, and parts manufacturing," She explained, turning to look at the projector. "Unfortunately, with that automation comes restriction."

The wire frame switched to a representation of the Diamond-class cruiser, the half-circle design familiar, though not exactly wanted. The ships were underarmed, with only two primary laser cannons, which may as well have been nothing at all.

"This facility is designed to build Diamond-class cruisers, and that's it. The standard version of cruiser is a transport first, and basically last too," Miru continued. "Its first priority is speed, its second is cargo capacity. It has room for a lot of cargo, flies at a blistering pace, and has a sub first-class hyperdrive. Unfortunately, it is hilariously underarmed."

She paused, tapping something on her datapad, and a moment later, the wireframe shifted slightly. It was the same general ship, but it was slightly different.

"Thankfully for us, there is an assault model in the memory banks, which the facility can produce. Unsurprisingly, it's more expensive, but it can do it," She explained, which immediately grabbed my attention. "They must have been rare, because I had never heard of them before. I did some research and found some records of it on the holonet, but not much."

"What sort of firepower does the assault version have?" I asked, trying to make sense of the model changes.

"Eight double turbolaser batteries and six anti-starfighter defense weapons, as well as a handful of point defense anti-missile weapons, which puts it right around the [Marauder](#) in terms of its plasma-based firepower," She explained confidently. "Though it lacks torpedo tubes and a hangar for starfighters, which puts it, overall, considerably lower than the Marauder. Still, it's not a bad ship. They were clearly trying to maintain their speed advantage, sacrificing the storage instead."

"Any idea why they didn't use it?" Ahoksa asked, her face pulled into a curious expression.

"You would know better than me, but it might have been to do with their naval doctrine," Miru pointed out. "Beyond a few exceptions, they seemed to generally prefer larger ships. The Diamond cruiser is 'only' two hundred meters."

"That... would make a certain amount of sense," Ahsoka admitted with a hesitant nod.

"Alright, so it's a fast ship that can hold its own, but is at risk for being overwhelmed by starfighters," I said, leaning back in my seat. "And we can make our own? That's-"

"Well, hold on, I'm not done yet," Miru said, cutting me off from saying anything positive. "This facility can turn metal stock into basic parts, and it can make some smaller, less complicated systems. But overall, it was designed to function in concert with other production facilities. We would have to stock it with a significant portion of the parts. Close to thirty percent of the total construction. We also don't have an infinite amount of droids to staff it."

"Do we have the parts and droids to finish this one?" I asked, vaguely gesturing down to the planet. "Specifically as an assault version?"

"Absolutely. We also have a good chunk of the parts we can't produce for a second one," She revealed. "But we would need a significant amount of metal stock."

"So we can make one, and most of another," I said with a frown. "How hard would securing the parts be?"

"Some of it would be easy, but that last ten, fifteen percent is going to get difficult fast," she responded. "These are older ships, and while Sorosuub still makes them, it's a big ship. It would certainly be better than buying them wholesale, especially since the assault version isn't

available, but it won't be cheap or easy to get in bulk. And again, we need droids to staff them. These ships only need a hundred and fifty crew, with the assault needing only twenty more, but that will add up fast."

"One step forward, two steps back," I said, rubbing my face and shaking my head.
"Okay... For now, get the facility to finish this ship in Assault configuration. Go slow and use it as an opportunity to learn its ins and outs and identify what you need to fix. Put together a list of what parts we need to finish the second one, and we can look into how difficult they would be to find. After that... we will see what we can do."