

We dropped out of hyperspace at our deployment point a day and a half later. Once there, we quickly organized our fleet. My team, as well as Corvak's team and Lieutenant Rider's clone crew, were all riding inside the *Chariot*, so we piled into the ship. Most of our passengers stayed in hangar bay, which usually contained ground vehicles, though it was now empty. Corvak, Rider, and I, however, remained in the lounge, where the large projector would allow us to keep track of the battle in real time, meaning I could give orders all the way through.

Half of 1st Group quickly formed up with half of 2nd Group, who would be following us down to the surface to cover us. The combined group would then disable the base's defenses and heavy assets, cover our people as we push through the base to rescue Vi and her people. The remaining members of each group would remain with the rest of the fleet. The *Whale Shark* would remain in deep space, as it was not necessary for combat.

Meanwhile, the main fleet would engage the Imperial fleet in orbit. The MA-wing starfighter squadrons would intercept the TIE fighter wings coming up from the surface, and our Heavy ARCs would work with our capital ships.

As we deployed from the *Fury*, so did all our starfighters. Our last leg of hyperspace would only be a few minutes long, meaning we would appear hot and ready to jump into combat, but our pilots would also be rested and clear-headed, taking the best of both worlds when it came to starfighter combat.

The pure number of ships involved was mind-boggling, with more than a hundred and fifty starfighters grouped into their squadrons and ready to go. Between them and our fleet of capital ships, I was feeling confident. As our starships deployed and settled into a loose formation, I checked in with all our leaders and captains to ensure everything was in order. I also double-checked with the Jedi stationed on the *Hope* and *Boxi's Fury*, and they both reconfirmed that, while they felt the tension of an incoming battle, beyond that, they didn't feel anything abnormal waiting for us.

Before we finally jumped, I had Calima put us through wide-spectrum comms, so I could address everyone.

"Alright, everyone, it's time to make the jump," I stated. "This is a rescue mission, so our rules and objectives are a bit different than usual. That said, you all know your roles, along with the secondary and tertiary plans. Stay sharp, trust one another, and support each other. Together, there's very little we can't accomplish. Good luck, and may the Force be with you."

Just about thirty seconds after I made my speech, we jumped, our ships disappearing one after the other as we slid into hyperspace. The wait was short, but nerve-racking, the holoprojector counting down the seconds until we finally popped back out into realspace, now above the Imperial claimed planet.

Immediately, we could see the Imperial fleet. They were in a loose formation, far above the planetside compound. We weren't all that far from them, off to the side and just at the edge of the planet's gravity field.

"They've seen us," the warning came through the comms almost immediately. "Starting the drop off."

Together, the larger ships moved, the *Hope* pulling forward with the *Fury* right behind it. The *Hope* was holding its fire, even as we entered close range, putting most of its energy into their upgraded shields as they weathered the Imperial barrage. Meanwhile, the *Fury* opened up with everything it could bring to bear, heavy turbolasers targeting the three IPVs and the Arquiten, slamming into their shields while they tried to return fire.

A large group of Heavy ARCs, escorted by two squadrons of MA-Wings, pulled through as well, unleashing a barrage of proton torpedoes, focused on one of the IPVs. There was a chain of missile launches, thirty in total, that completely overwhelmed one of them immediately, detonating the patrol craft in seconds.

The Imperial fleet, who were tasked with defending the planet, couldn't afford to pull back too much, which made it all the easier for the *Hope* to chase them down. The carrier still held its fire, focusing on overpowering its own shields. As it passed by the Gladiator several thousand meters away, but just about as close as we could hope to get, the ship rotated, and from its hangar exploded eight LAATi transports, pushing for speed as a squadron. A squadron of MA-wings and Heavy ARCs each flew alongside them, escorting the ships to their destination. The modified A-wings, piloted by our enhanced pilots, tore through the few TIE fighters that the Gladiator had, some barely even making it out of the forward hangar.

"C'mon... C'mon.... Get the timing right..." I muttered to myself as I watched, chewing the inside of my cheek.

The Heavy ARCs, who had been harassing the other IPVs, suddenly switched targets, firing a barrage of proton torpedoes at the Gladiator, the explosives slamming into their shields and exploding in brilliant flashes. The *Hope*, with their superior sensors capable of detecting the enemy shield level, bombarded the ship with its heavy turbolasers.

Even as the LAATi transports got closer and closer, the barrage continued, until finally, right before the troop shuttles reached their destination, a streak of blue laser energy slapped into the Imperial ship's shields, which sparked, shimmered, and failed, the tail end of the turbolaser blast carving a furrow along its right forward point.

All eight of the speeding LAATi transports, carrying the *Hope*'s two ground teams, a total of forty-three clone troopers, as well as another sixty beskar armored BX battle droids and several slicer droids, pulled back and decelerated, killing just enough speed to land safely inside the hangar of the Gladiator.

The second the shields went down, our entire fleet shifted priorities. The Gladiator now contained allies, meaning we needed to kill all the other ships before it was taken over, to keep them from trying to scuttle the now shieldless ship.

On top of that, the two wings of TIE fighters from the surface had finally arrived, and our entire force of MA-wings swung around to greet them, joined by the *Wonder*, who focused on the coming horde but still stayed close to the *Hope*.

The rest of the fleet, at least the portions meant to be staying in space, continued to attack the Imperial capital ships. A second IPV was destroyed, and the Arquitens' shields failed. The latter attempted to move behind the *Gladiator*, trying to use our on-board allies as a shield, only for the *Hope* to pull up and under the ship, putting the Arquiten right in the sights of its heavy turbolasers. Before it could correct its mistake, a turbolaser barrage, followed by a dozen proton torpedoes, cracked the ship in half, fire and debris pouring from the wreck.

The final IPV was hunted down by the Heavy ARCs, ultimately surrendering when they took down its shields and exploded half its weapons. As I heard of its surrender, I ordered it brought into the *Fury*, so it could be safely recovered.

While the space fleet was working on taking down the remaining ships, the *Gladiator* was trying to do anything, its weapons firing nonstop. Unfortunately for them, most of their weapons could only target the *Fury*, as the *Hope* had swung under its belly. The *Fury*'s shields were more than up to the task of weathering the *Gladiator*'s attacks, essentially neutering them. The ships did disable a few weapons with their ion cannons, but since we wanted to make a swift retreat after we were done, we couldn't disable too much without stranding the ship.

With the fleet destroyed, neutralized, or surrendered, it was time for the ground teams to descend. As one, we came out of hiding from behind the *Fury*, angling downwards steeply, with two squadrons of MA-wings and one Heavy ARC moving to follow us, though I couldn't help but notice the squadrons assigned to us were missing a few ships.

I cursed when I spotted the lower numbers, knowing that something must have happened to them during the fight. Unfortunately, there was nothing I could do now, and I trusted my people to handle any issues once the fighting was done.

While the *Gladiator* took a few pot shots at us, by the time they noticed us, we were too far away for them to accurately shoot. We continued to descend, faster and faster. We punched through the cloud layer, and the ground fleet kept going, while the *Chariot* held back, pulling up and hiding along the clouds. Meanwhile, Corvak, Rider, and I ran through the ship, joining our teams in the hangar, which was open and ready.

"All set, Calima!" I sent through comms, and suddenly the view outside the hangar shifted, and we were suddenly looking down at the ground while still standing flat on the hangar bay floor. "Okay, everyone, let's move! Watch your instruments, decelerate before a hundred meters, and expect dark troopers around every corner!"

Together, we ran towards the open hangar door, leaping out of it and into the open air. Above us, the *Chariot* continued on, dipping into the clouds to hide from heavy laser turrets, while the ground fleet swarmed around the base. We fell like stones, using our arms to stabilize ourselves. I could see two of Corvak and Rider's men split to stabilize their slicer droids, while

Vaz and Nal helped Racer. Two dozen TIE fighters screamed around the base, almost as if they were scanning for us, before they were torn apart by our MA-wing escort.

We continued to plummet to the ground, the harsh, duracrete, and metal buildings below rushing up to greet us. Our altimeter read out lower and lower numbers, until finally, the ground shockingly close, our repulsorlifts kicked in and we drastically slowed, fast enough that by the time our feet hit the ground, most of us were feeling dizzy from our blood pooling in our lower extremities. I quickly threw some light healing spells in case anyone was rattled, but it seemed like we had landed well.

Of course, we weren't landing silently, in an unsuspecting base, like we had last time the 1st Group did a repulsor jump infiltration. Instead, this base was on high alert, its defenses were burning, and enemy ships were crushing anyone with guns big enough to threaten them. Already, I could see several AT-ATs, blown apart and billowing black clouds of smoke, as well as a half dozen turbolaser turrets, reduced to crumbling duracrete and scrap metal.

"Okay, guys, this is a loud stealth situation," I said. "Our best chance of moving around even relatively secretly is to kill everything that might report us. We move fast, hit hard, and find our targets. Then we get the hell out of here."

After the confirmations came through, our three teams split up, each of us heading in different directions. Corvak and Rider were essentially serving as cover for us, pretending to search buildings and interrogate Imperial, as if we didn't know where they were holding Vi and her people. Meanwhile, my team would be heading directly to them, since I could track her and her people anywhere on the planet.

Together, my team ran, running and gunning through the huge Imperial base. Several times, we ran headlong into Imperial forces, but between my magic and everyone's lasers, we made quick work of them. Through our comms, we heard reports of both Rider and Corvak running into dark trooper squads. Corvak's men tore through them pretty easily with only light injuries, all of his men more than comfortable with melee fighting, our beskar vibroblades carving through their armor. Rider was lucky to catch a squad unawares and ended up dropping a few dozen grenades in their lap.

As we were well aware, beskar armor beat a lot of things, but explosives above a certain level was not among them.

We followed my Clairvoyance spell deeper into the base, until finally it led us, no surprise, to one of the [central structures](#), built in [grandiose Imperial](#) standard style, meaning it looked like a cross between a [palace and a prison](#).

We had barely begun to move towards the structure's entrance when a squad of Dark troopers stepped out and immediately opened fire, the front line spraying blaster bolts along our position.

I quickly cast my full-body conjured armor and activated my buff spell before charging into the dark troopers. Behind me, my team followed, taking advantage of my charge to catch

the troopers off balance. With a shout, I drew my beskar sword, thrusting it forward and punching it through a trooper's chest, before whipping around and beheading another. Another trooper tried to stab me with a beskar dagger, only for it to slide off my conjured armor. I blasted him with Flames, blocking his vision while I dispatched a third trooper who was charging at me.

Before I could fully turn to deal with the one who tried to stab me, Ahsoka put one of her sabers up and under his arm, the plasma blade carving through a weak spot, one that we didn't have thanks to our flexible beskar weave. She then kicked him back, enhancing the blow with the force, hard enough to send the now corpse tumbling into several other troopers.

Around me, my team was cutting through the trooper, working together to make it look almost easy. Nal, one of our better shots, was walking behind Vaz, his pistol raised, firing stun shots over her shoulder. The shots couldn't make it through the dark trooper armor, but it was bright and flared when it hit their helmets, blinding them long enough for Vaz to easily cut through them.

Julus and Tatnia used a similar technique, but rather than have someone do the shooting for them, they held their pistols in one hand and their blades in the other. They stuck together, covering each other as they picked off anyone trying to flank or surprise their partner. Using the stun blast to startle and blind the dark troopers was something we had come up with together during our many sparring sessions, as a way to deal with anyone armored as much as us.

Of course, I then asked Pola to make sure it wouldn't work on us. It took an upgrade to our helmets, which cost about a thousand credits and was slowly being rolled out, but he had added rapid flash protection to our optics.

As the rest of my team worked together, so did Ahsoka and I. We pushed through and decimated the dark troopers, cutting and punching through their lines, easily covering for each other as we did. My sword was actually more effective at cutting through their armor than Ahsoka's lightsabers, so she covered me as I did most of the damage.

As we start to push the dark troopers back, over a dozen of them already dead, a few of them attempted to catch us off guard by switching tactics, pulling out grenades, and tossing them at us. Thankful both Ahsoka and I were paying attention, as she could bat them aside with the Force, while I used Telekinesis, snagging the grenade out of the air and whipping it back where they came from.

When we finally stood inside the entrance, a trail of dead dark troopers behind us, we took a moment to collect ourselves. We were all more than a little roughed up, as while we had clearly come out on top, the dark troopers were still not easy to beat. Both Julus and Vaz needed healing, both of them having been stabbed by beskar knives. While I worked, Tatnia and Nal cleared the entrance hall, covering the major entry points.

As I stood, both my crew members healed, I noticed Ahsoka leaning heavily against the wall. With a curse, I rushed towards her, fearing she had been injured.

"Ahsoka, you okay?" I asked, already hitting her with a healing spell. "Did you get hit?"

"No... I'm..." She trailed off, standing up straight and shaking off the momentary weakness. "I felt something, something bad. I... I think he is coming here, Deacon. I think Vader is on his way."