

## The Opposite of Shortcut

My immediate thought wasn't even the implications of running into an outpost when I was in a hurry to meet up with the main forces of the House; my first thought was actually, "how they could possibly get an outpost thrown together so quickly." It was supposed to be a shortcut through the side streets to meet up with the main Scholae Palatinae forces but with the presence of an outpost it wasn't looking that way.

I'm actually lucky I didn't just run right up to it in haste. That would have been something. I mean, I was in a hurry but, not in a big enough hurry to get blasted to bits. I managed to duck in behind a parked vehicle unnoticed, irritated, and started to quickly weigh my options.

At first I thought about backtracking to the main street and taking the long way around safely in the wake of the main force. This wasn't a time to play it safe though, the Imperial Palace was occupied by enemies and the status of the Emperor was unknown. Well, I feel like I would have sensed some disturbance in the Force if he were to die, so at least at that moment I assumed he was alive.

Either way, I quickly decided the path forward was the best one, outpost or not. So I peeked out briefly to see what I was up against...

The outpost was about sixteen meters across, actually I didn't have time to measure but my prior knowledge of Imperial Transportation Administration codes suggested as such. They managed two raised platforms on either side of the road, shoddy but effective, since on each sat a sniper with their rifle pointed in my direction. Lucky me they hadn't managed to spot me. Force be with me.

Below each, protected by barricades, were two heavy repeating blasters on each side, a total of four. As if somehow two weren't enough. They had four. Everything these Scions had done since they arrived was kind of crazy so I guess this shouldn't be any exception. There were at least six soldiers on each side down below manning the guns or milling about.

That was about all I could make out from my vantage. There was obviously quite a bit of equipment back behind the walls I couldn't see. Maybe more troops. Who knew what might sit behind the barricades that protected the blaster rifles as well. Then of course somewhere nearby was the necessary power generator to support such intense weaponry.

I ran through probably a thousand scenarios in my head. From using my lightsaber to deflect sniper fire and four powerful repeating blasters and use their weaponry against them like a ball of lightsaber light all the way to walking up and just asking if maybe they'd be kind enough to let me through if I asked nicely. None of them ended well.

I was out of solid options, but I was also livid.

I can't say I was thinking clearly. In fact, I openly admit now I wasn't. That's probably going to become quickly apparent when you hear what I did next.

The anger built in me, and as it did so, I could feel the Dark Side coursing through my entire body as I stood up from my hiding spot. I wielded that Force as a weapon, reaching out as a first strike and knocking the sniper on the left backward from his perch. I had no idea at the time what damage I caused with the initial strike. I imagine it was quite painful.

I was committed now. No turning back.

Time seemed to slow down, the sniper I struck first, his rifle now pointing in the sky still moving away from me. My eyes shifted right. I quickly moved my attention to the other sniper.

The snipers seemed to be the most dangerous from a distance. So they had to go first.

I knew I couldn't just knock them out one by one. I needed to inflict more damage. As I took my second step forward I grabbed the heavy repeating blaster on the far right with the Force and pulled it upward. Inch by inch it lifted from the ground. The soldier manning the weapon grabbed on sensing its unnatural movement. I think maybe he was trying to keep it from flying away.

As the weapon launched upwards it connected with the sniper's rifle before he could get off a shot in my direction. Moments later the massive weapon connected with his body. The full blunt of the weapon pushed the sniper backwards.

The left sniper was already gone from my sight behind the barricade. Now the sniper on the right disappeared followed by the gun, the soldier holding onto it, and a string of cables connected to it.

A bright flash of crimson caught my eye. The first shots fired. I ignited my lightsaber. I welcomed the familiar hum filling my ears and sapphire glow of the blade in my peripheral.

I felt unstoppable.

Only a shot would never come. The remaining heavy repeating blaster on the right blew up. I caught the main body of the weapon being torn apart by a bright crimson explosion. It's as if a thousand shots went off all at the same time from inside the weapon in all directions.

Shortly following, was a chain reaction of explosions that even in my heightened state of awareness I couldn't truly follow. But I will do my best to recollect them.

Immediately in front of the makeshift raised platform on the right where the blaster exploded, a series of shockwave type explosions would follow, one after another. I can only assume it was a collection of grenades. Pop, pop, pop. They would continue to go off. The armor was torn from the bodies of the remaining soldiers, then flesh.

The soldier who gripped the weapon I tossed over the top would be the lucky one. Or so I thought.

From behind the platform I heard a crackle and snap that was distinctly different from the explosions occurring in front. It brought me memories of Force lightning as I watched electricity arc across the

outpost. The platform wouldn't last long against the explosions in the front before gaps began to form revealing what was happening behind it.

That weapon I tossed had landed square on a power generator. The sniper and soldier who gripped to the weapon were being cooked alive by electricity. I only saw them for a brief moment before the smoldering smoke of the explosions filled the air and flames began to emerge.

By the time the generator finally went dead, and the last of the explosions went off, only thirty seconds or so had passed. Thick black smoke poured from the right side of the outpost. Stunned and disoriented, six or so Scions with lifeless heavy repeating blasters came to their senses to the left.

I continued my approach at a brisk pace, my lightsaber ready to my side. One of the surviving Scions on the left side spotted me and desperately opened fire. Brilliant emerald bolts quickly covered the distance towards me and in stride I deflected the first bolt back.

It would fly back and land square in the face of another Scion who was about to join the attack. His body immediately went limp. His brain liquefied in his head as the energy of the blast entered through the front of his skull.

Shortly following, another explosion would go off. The best I can figure, that Scion I killed was about to toss a live grenade in my direction. As I harmlessly deflected several more blasts, that's the last attack I would endure.

It wouldn't be a series of explosions this time, but the one remaining explosion was enough to break the bodies of the remaining Scions. I would sense no more movement from them as I approached.

When I got within a few meters of the outpost I deactivated my lightsaber and reattached it to my hilt. I wouldn't stop my approach until I was standing in the center of the outpost and looked around.

Charred burning rubble on the right, a mixture of equipment, structure and bodies burned. A burned out power generator sat lifeless.

Blood poured from open wounds on the Scions to the left from the explosion covering the ground in a deep crimson color. The sniper I struck first lifeless behind the platform, his neck broken on impact as blood poured from his face.

The Dark Side of the Force is a powerful tool. It took only sixty seconds from when I first spotted the outpost to standing there in the middle of it, it ended up being a short cut after all.

Or maybe it was the scenic route.