

I turned around fully to study all three of the Mandalorians, mentally noting that their weapons were holstered or hanging from straps. Whatever the reason, the leader was approaching us as close to unarmed as he was probably voluntarily willing to ever get. Not wanting to be rude, I stepped forward and held out my hand.

"Deacon Roy, leader of the Skyforged Vanguard," I greeted.

After a moment, the Mandalorian reached out and clasped my arms in a warrior's handshake, gripping it tightly. As he did, I got a good look at his symbol, which looked like some sort of closing claw.

"Covank Syr, Leader of Clan Syr," He responded, his voice partially modulated by his helmet. "Or at least what remains."

"Well, Covank Syr, what can the Skyforged Vanguard do for you?" I asked, stepping aside to allow them to enter further.

"I came to meet the new guys," He explained with a shrug, stepping into our private booth, both of his compatriots standing by the doorway. "By the sounds of it, we will be working around each other a lot."

"It would seem so," I responded with a nod. "Lord Grakkus seems determined to have his way, so who am I to deny him?"

"He's got a reputation of getting what he wants," Covank admitted, turning to look out of the large window along the far wall. "With little care for those who get in his way."

"Unsurprising, you don't get to be what he is without crushing people beneath your heel," I pointed out, shaking my head. "Though I suppose this does answer one of my own questions. Whether or not your clan works with Grakkus frequently."

"We... have a mutual understanding with the Hutt," He explained, the pause heavy with some sort of meaning that I couldn't understand, though it was far from pleasant. "We have been working as his personal bodyguards in preparation for meeting you."

"Is that right? I supposed I should be flattered that he felt we would require such well-known fighters to defend against," I responded. "Though we have no intent of causing unnecessary harm."

"Good. I can only hope working under Lord Grakkus remains as profitable as possible for both of us," He responded, his helmet turning to look over everyone before settling on me. "You are building quite the reputation for yourself, and I will admit, your armor is quite impressive."

"Our armorer is a smart kid. He works hard to keep us all protected," I responded. "Perhaps one day I could introduce you."

That got a reaction, his head tilting slightly as he studied me closely. Communicating through two layers of armor was difficult, but luckily, his confusion came through well enough.

"You would welcome us into your home?"

"I would welcome any true ally to my home," I assured him. "The only question would be if that applies to you. And given the situation at hand... I don't see why we couldn't be allies."

For a long moment, Corvak stared in my direction as if trying to chew through my words. Eventually, he nodded, seeming to come to some kind of conclusion.

"Well, this has been enlightening, but I believe I've taken enough of your time," He said, giving me another nod before moving towards the door. "Lord Grakkus would not be pleased if he learned I was disturbing his guests."

"Of course, thank you for stopping by."

He nodded and left, his people following after him. He was barely out of sight when Tatnia put her hand on my shoulder, approaching me from behind.

"That was a warning."

"I could tell," I responded with a frown. "Any clearer, and he would have been shaking me, telling me to run."

The first warning was rather obvious. The only reason Grakkus would get his hands on a protection detail like this, specifically for us, was if he expected trouble. So either A, he was looking to ambush us, or he was expecting us to try and rob him. While the latter was very possible, there would be no reason for Corvak to warn us. The talk about Grakkus getting what he wants, even at the detriment of others, that Corvak was sure we would be working around each other, and finally that any work we did do was as profitable as possible...

He was telling us we would be fighting, and that while he hoped neither side would take losses, but he had no choice. Because Grakkus always got what he wanted.

"Why would he do that?" Tatnia asked. "Warning us puts his people at risk. It gives us a chance to prepare!"

"Because he is hoping we will run, that we will try and escape before we have to fight," I explained, shaking my head. "He said it himself, we are the new guys on the block, and while our armor is impressive..."

"They are Mandalorians," She finished. "He doesn't want to have to butcher us."

I nodded in agreement before pulling away and finding a spot to sit down. All of us made casual conversation, first waiting for the bloody show to begin, then politely watching. Thankfully, Grakkus wasn't throwing sacrifices into the pit to be eviscerated by beasts or warriors but rather hiring actual fighters to put on real shows. It was bloody, brutal, and disturbing, but according to the information we had access to from the screens placed around the booth, the fighters were being paid well.

At least those that survived were.

We passed the time by placing small bets through the services provided by the arena, mostly just playing the casual, unconcerned viewer. The better we played the role Grakkus expected us to, the less likely he was to go the extra mile when he finally betrayed us. And now that we knew for sure it was going to happen, it was actually surprisingly easier to relax. Before, we had no idea what we were waiting for, no idea when we should push, and no idea when we started our plan. Now we knew we were headed down to the vault eventually, and judging by the rising anticipation that Ahsoka could feel, it would happen then.

When the final bout of gladiatorial violence was over, which ended up being a fight between a small group of warriors and a large monstrosity I actually didn't recognize but made Vaz shudder when it was announced, the show came to an end. One of the Mandalorians came to get us, and we stepped out of our booth to find Grakkus and his guards waiting.

"And now that we have eaten and enjoyed some entertainment, it is time to get to business!" Grakkus said, his cybernetic legs clicking as he moved. "Come, I will show you the vault, and then we will talk."

Grakkus and his Mandalorian guards led us back into the large, Hutt-sized turbolift. Once the door was closed, Grakkus leaned into the control panel and seemed to activate some sort of scanner and security system. The entire turbolift shuddered and began to descend.

"I have been collecting Jedi artifacts for many years," Grakkus explained after a long moment of silence. "Before the rise of the Empire, my main competitor was the Jedi Order itself. When Emperor Palpatine wiped out the Order, my greatest competitor became the Empire's propaganda and intelligence agency, who would stop at nothing to destroy any artifacts they could get their hands on. It's a tragedy, but with every artifact they destroy, my collection goes up in value."

Grakkus laughed at that statement, seemingly happy that his collection was worth so much now, even though owning it would absolutely lead to the Empire kicking down the front door.

The turbolift descended for another few seconds, once again in silence, before we could eventually feel it slow to a stop. After a moment, the door opened, and Grakkus walked out, leading the way through a long corridor. There were obvious defenses, including a pair of half-domed shapes built into the wall I was relatively certain were turrets. The hallway split a few times, making me think that this elevator was not the only way down but rather Grakkus's personal transportation,

"For quite some time, I lamented the destruction of the Jedi Order," He admitted, once again activating a security panel, this one taking several steps before the massive vault door opened. "They were a nuisance at the best of times, and an infuriating waste of money at the worst, but with the Jedi wiped out, I was forced to give up a particular dream. My dream of securing what I would be considered the final, finishing pieces of my collection."

We followed the muscular Hutt into the vault, and I could feel the rising tension. The vault interior was vast, the size of at least a full football field. It was filled with statues, artifacts,

large sarcophagi, and countless other ancient artifacts. I could see rows upon rows of lightsabers, all stored carefully on shelves and inside protective cases. Just like in the comic, I could even see an [Aethersprite](#) sitting in one corner.

I could also see our hovercarts, now empty of our delivery, sitting just inside the vault entrance. The pair of Mandalorians that had been assigned as an escort were waiting for us as well, but our labor droids were nowhere to be seen.

As we followed the Hutt in, he stopped beside a large, tarp-covered item. It was two or three feet taller than I was and about twice as wide as my full wing span.

"For so long, I thought to myself I would never be able to finish my collection, and then you, Deacon Roy, and you, Ahsoka Tano, walk into my vault as if to fulfill my dream."

My stomach flipped when he said Ahsoka's name. He had been on to it since the beginning. Maybe he didn't know that our clients didn't exist, but he certainly knew Ahsoka's past. It didn't exactly change the plan, but it was disturbing, to say the least. The muscular Hutt laughed uproariously as he read our shift in demeanor.

"Did you think I wouldn't know?" He asked with a chuckle, his legs clicking as he stood there, reaching out to grab the tarp. "The Rebellion rubs elbows with smugglers every day. Did you really think a Jedi leaving the Rebellion wouldn't reach my ears? Oh, how I love naive fools. They are so easy to trick. And now I can complete my collection!"

He yanked the tarp back, revealing two large pods with see-through fronts. I could clearly see inside, where there were straps and braces clearly designed to hold someone down. At first glance, it was some sort of stasis chamber, a guess confirmed a moment later.

"Two live Jedi, a male and female, carefully sealed and stored in perfect stasis!" Grakkus shouted, the greed flaring in his eyes as his legs clicked and twitched.

For a long moment, the vault was as silent as the grave. The tarp that Grakkus had pulled fluttered to the ground, and we all stared at what he had revealed.

"Holy shit," I finally said. "You actually think you can force us into those?"

"Do you really not understand your position?" Grakkus asked, gesturing around us. "Do you expect me to believe you would choose death?"

I looked around the room at the Mandalorians who had been "secretly" herding us together. While some of them were armed with the same weapons, others were armed with obvious slugthrowers, while others wielded what I was pretty sure were nonlethal net launchers.

"Right... Okay, so let's pretend I consider them a threat," I said, focusing on Grakkus. "You are aware that I am not, in fact, a Jedi, correct?"

"You have been seen doing incredible things beyond the realm of normal beings," He responded, laughing with his deep, gravel-filled voice. "Do you really still pretend to not be a Jedi? Certainly, you are unique, but I have been told that the force works in mysterious ways."

"Jesus Christ, whatever you say, Spider-Hutt. Corvack!" I shouted, turning to face the Mandalorian leader, who was steadily holding his blaster carbine, focused on me. "What does he have on you? Blackmail? Slave implants?"

"Our families," He responded with a heavy voice. "He has our families."

"...would killing him endanger them?" I asked. "Any sort of dead man's switch or last resort mutually assured destruction?"

"If his heart stops, they all die."

"Hmm... that does make this more complicated..."

"ENOUGH! You will surrender or I will begin executing your crew members!" Grakkus shouted, pointing at me with a big, meaty fist. "I'll kill every single one of them, then stuff you in these stasis tubes for the next thousand years!"

"Wait, hold on," I said, holding up my hand. "Let me just get all of this straight. You knew that we had Ahsoka Tano on our team, so when we came to you selling Jedi relics, you used it as a way to get us here so you could add us to your collection."

"Corvack, shoot the tall one!" Grakkus ordered, growling at my complete lack of reverence or fear.

The Mandalorian leader, probably trying to make it quick and painless, spun slightly to aim at his new target. He quickly fired his carbine, the sights set directly on Nal's head. The bolt of yellow plasma snapped across the gap, hit Nal's helmet, and ricocheted off, flying across the vault until it impacted a three-meter-tall statue, taking a double fist-sized chunk out of it. Nal barely even flinched, his head rocking back slightly from the impact.

"And you never once considered for a moment that maybe we were working a plan on you?" I asked, not even skipping a beat since I knew Nal would be fine. "I got news for you, Lord Grakkus. We came here voluntarily because you've been hoarding things that don't belong to you. Our clients never existed, and we are here for your holocrons. Tatnia, set them off and tell Calima it's go time."

"Sure thing, Boss."

Now, the plan had always been to infiltrate the base and use Racer as a way to take control of the palace or at least shut down its security system. The problem was that we couldn't just bring him in with us. At best, Grakkus would have been suspicious of a random droid, and at worst, he would surmise what Racer was for.

The massive Hutt would, however, allow a quartet of large labor droids inside to make moving his new artifacts easier. Labor droids were cheap and everywhere, constantly hitting the same spot that janitorial services fell under. This meant people usually ignored them, even when they didn't belong somewhere.

These particular labor droids were programmed to make their deliveries before heading out on their own. They were instructed to find something important within the palace as they made their way back to the landing platform. They were then instructed to blend in and sit tight.

For a good while, they had been waiting, stuffed to the absolute brim with high explosives, all set to make a distraction big enough to let Racer and fifteen commando droids sneak inside the palace.

Moments after I gave the command, even with how deep we were, we could all feel the explosions go off, sending a slight tremor through the vault.

And then the fun started.