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Being back in Synin's company is strange, very strange. And it's not just because he is strange. When I left, I never expected to see him again. At the time I never wanted to see him again. He was a part of painful memories. Servitude, torture, suffering, those are all I thought of when I thought of him. Despite being an important figure in my life, I never grew attached to him. Despite his grudging respect, I never grew fond of him. I never returned that respect. I never even thought of him as a master. He was just another one of *them*.

At least that's what I thought before I came to Korriban.

In Bane's tomb I realized something. I felt something I never associated with him before. I cared about him. I could have watched him fail. There was a time that would have brought me supreme satisfaction. He didn't even realize I could help him until I spoke up and told him. It would have been easy. I could have watched him flail away at that door. I could have watched him fail until Ashen's men arrived. And then I could have left him to die, or at least suffer. I must admit the thought did occur to me. But I didn't listen to it. Why? Because suddenly I felt something for him.

I'll probably spend weeks figuring it out after this. So many thoughts had come at once. But what came through was that Synin had cared about me. He might never admit it. He might never even realize it given his insanity. But for at least a fleeting moment it was there. And for at least one fleeting moment, I cared for him. I couldn't watch him suffer even after all the times he watched me suffer. We worked together and accomplished something. What we still didn't yet know, but something. I might have even enjoyed that feeling.

None of that explains why I'm here with him.

After we pulled the thing out of Bane's tomb, he insisted we head for Dreshdae. Synin still hasn't told me what it is or what it does, but he said coming here now was critical. He said he knew someone here that had important documents. Didn't tell me what they were, but I can't help but surmise they have something to do with 'the item'. Synin keeps calling it that and I can't think of a better name. It looks like we're headed into a cantina, a logical place to meet a contact. From the outside it looks quiet, I suspect that it won't stay that way for long.

As we cross the threshold into the building I can still hear fighting in the distance. Three great armies clashing mere kilometers away and above and no one seems to care. At least they're not acting like they care. Both Ashen's and Cotelin's forces seem to be racing towards Dreshdae. They're also going out of their way to slow the other down. While control of a major settlement is a logical goal in war, this isn't a normal war. Ashen needs something, Cotelin needs to prevent him from finding it, and Esoteric...well I'm not sure what he's up to. It could have something to do with what Synin is looking for. It's hard to know because I'm not sure what Synin expects to find here. That doesn't mean it's not a logical assumption. If it does turn out to be true, one thing is clear.

We're going to have one heck of a fight on our hands.

The cantina is a dark and dirty place, unsurprising. Synin pulls the hood of his robe up and makes for a table in the back corner. I follow suit and move with him. Synin's YVH, Skulls, takes up a position to watch the room. Goldie, his ASN courier droid, quickly darts off as if looking for someone. The IT-O unit he calls Needles hovers nearby. No matter how much I try to ignore it, that thing still gives me the creeps. Synin is strangely wordless which I've learned is his way of showing nervousness. It's something we have in common. Anxiety makes us retreat into our minds. We start looking for every threat. We plot every contingency, track every asset, look for all exits. Everyone here is armed, overtly or not. Logical assumption. Likelihood of presence of enemy agents, 83.2 per cent. Internal security, minimal. Tables unlikely to withstand sustained fire. Exits, front, back left, behind bar.

“So, you're the one looking for the tablets.”

A male voice broke my focus as well as Synin's. We were too lost in thought to hear Goldie's soft whirring nearby. Normally he'd pipe up, but the voice did so first. I snapped around to look at him. Middle-aged human male. Near average height and build. Snappy dresser. Cigarette and the smell of several more. Slugthrower, left hip. The Force is with him.

“He is,” Skulls replied as per always. “I take it you're mister Grey?”

“Connor to you, metalmouth,” the human answered. He had no idea how bad an idea it was to insult one of Synin's droids. I've seen people get shocked for lines like that. I'd been shocked for a lot less. But Synin kept his cool. This must be that important.

“My master doesn't have much time Mister Grey, do you have the tablets or not?” Skulls clenched a hand as it spoke as if it was ready to punch the human.

“Depends, do you have the rest of my money?” A treasure hunting, Force-using merc. Just what I didn't need to deal with today.

“Tablets first, than money. That was the arrangements and I, we're, in no mood to negotiate.” Skulls was always forgetting who was in charge, or maybe he wasn't.

“I don't know if you've noticed metalhead,” the human took a drag on his cigarette before finishing the sentence. “There's a lot of people coming for what I've uncovered. So I have plenty of reason to negotiate.”

Needles starts floating towards the human at the sound of this. Synin is clearly agitated. At the same time I notice someone coming in. He's trying to blend in, and probably did to most people. Something seemed off about him though. Subtlety is clearly not his thing. I get the feeling I've seen him before as we left the tomb. That leads to only one conclusion. He's one of Ashen's men.

I glance at Skulls and send him a message, a warning. Out of an abundance of caution, and with Synin's permission, I set it up so Skulls could receive my natural transmissions. Quicker and more clear than telepathy. Besides, Synin would pick up on the guy. Skulls silently nods an understanding before returning his attention to the treasure hunter.

“Mister Grey, you might get offered more money by one of the other parties. However my master offers you a way out of the crossfire you'll soon find yourself in. Should you refuse, I'm fairly certain it will get ugly soon.”

The newcomer seemed to hear this and it got his attention. Knowing Skulls, that was probably intentional. His fingers immediately triggered a comlink. I'll have to remember to challenge this guy to sabbac sometime. His tells are amazingly obvious. Likelihood of reinforcements inbound, 91%. Ashen's forces nearby. Cotelin's forces not far behind. Friendly reinforcements, not readily available. Extraction within Dreshade, challenging but possible. Still need tablets. Only treasure hunter knows where they are. Noting datapad in left hip pocket. Could grab and run. Synin is capable opponent, but will likely be outmanned. Could fight together, increase odds. Treasure hunter will probably try and slip away during firefight. Less desirable option generally, but higher probability of Synin's survival.

Why is that even a factor?

That's the real thing here. Yesterday, I would not have cared even the slightest for him. The mission would be all that mattered. Synin could rot on this rock for all I cared. Now, now it wasn't that simple. Even if for a fleeting moment we had a bond. Synin might never remember or care, but I do. Can I really abandon him now? Would I really die for him?

It felt like a lot longer, but it was only a few seconds. After some talking that I didn't quite hear, the newcomer pulled a blaster rifle. A split second later several armed men in the armor of the Iron Throne stormed into the cantina. Synin's purple blade flared to life almost immediately and Skulls assumed a fighting stance. The newcomer shouted over the patrons that were scurrying for cover or the exits.

“Mister Grey will be coming with us. You have five seconds to surrender.”

Well, it came down to this. Is Synin's life worth it?

Four seconds.

The memories of pain.

Three seconds.

The bonds we'd forged.

Two seconds.

The one person who respected me.

One second.

My orange blade joins Synin's.

The chaos begins.