

AGGRESSIVE NEGOTIATIONS

By Blade Ta'var

34 ABY

(Part 3 of Starfall Series after 'Beneath the Mines')

Chapter 1 - On Strike!

Excidium commissioned him yet again for another job on Aesirus. This time it was a far more enjoyable task and one that hit close to home. Bale Andros' hulking figure towered over the miners that surrounded him in the makeshift mess hall. He looked at their dejected faces and knew all too well their plight. Memories of working with shoddy machinery inside a mine came back to him and he recalled the back-breaking work that often went underappreciated. Simply put, Bale was a simple man surrounded by simple folk. This was going to be easy and the credits made it even sweeter.

Make the miners go on strike...Such a simple task.

"Gather round, everyone! Drinks on me!" He put on an easy smile as he called out to the assembled group, who responded enthusiastically in turn.

"Hooray!"

"Good on ya mate."

"Cheers!"

The Zabrak waited until everyone was seated around him and then continued in a slightly raised voice.

"Everyone here knows the value of a hard day's work. You deserve this drink. To a good life, a good wage, and plenty of good booze!" Bale toasted the crowd, who responded enthusiastically.

"Now, those with clean hands have no idea what the mines are like. They underpay you! They force you to work long hours for little pay, while they collect all the profit." The Hunter could already hear grumbling starting to spread amongst the crowd.

"Yeah, so what? We can't do anything about it," interjected one of the miners.

"Oh, really? I remember when I worked the mines. I knew every inch of it and its equipment. Now, who has the real power?" Bale argued loudly.

“They do. We protest and they fire us for cheaper labor. I need the money to feed my family.” The miner said in a defeated tone. The Zabrak nodded off in the distance before staring everyone down.

“Well, I’ve brought some friends with me who are willing to let you run the show for once. And they have the bigger guns. Take a look.” Bale gestured as he swept his arm towards the guard towers. They fell one by one, each too surprised to scream as their life ended in a heartbeat.

“Now, let’s take over the mines for ourselves!” The Hunter urged the crowd before rushing towards the complex. The crowd hesitated at first, but started to run with him after they saw a guard from the tower try to kill another miner. A solitary yell turned into a thunderous charge.

Chapter 2 - Precision Strikes

Zehsaa Hysh laid prone on the ground high above the mess hall and guard towers, calmly taking out guard after guard.

Pew.

Pew.

Pew.

Pew.

Fours shots went off in quick succession as she tried to prevent the SoroSuub guards from firing on the rampaging miners. Each shot was true, but unfortunately it was just her. She let loose shot after shot as she covered their retreat, but a few lost souls below felt the burn of SoroSuub blasters. She grimaced and twisted her gun around, aiming for the guard towers furthest away.

Pew.

Pew.

Pew.

Pew.

Four more shots and four more falling bodies and it was all clear... for now. She picked up her sniper rifle and ran along the high ridge, running past the rioters to keep their path safe on their way to the main compound. She saw a rooftop nearby not far from the main compound’s central square and jumped onto it. She quickly set up her gun again and took aim at any of the stationed guards.

Pew.

Pew.

Pew.

Pew.

Anguished screams and yells echoed from far away as each mark bit the dust.

Zing.

The Togruta fell flat to the ground as a stray bolt passed by her and made an scorched mark in the wall behind her. She edged up to find her attacker but only found several small turrets, that conveniently had some decent range.

“Kark you, Jorm. I thought I told you to kill the turrets before I got here. They have me pinned down.” Zehsaa shouted into her comlink.

“Just sit tight and enjoy the show. You’re lucky I don’t charge you tickets.” Jorm’s teasing voice answered in good humor as he laughed.

The Togruta merely growled and thought, *God damn it, Jorm!*

Chapter 3 - Explosive Returns

Jorm Na’trej whistled as he worked, planting small charges on power lines that fed the turret guns several levels above him. Interestingly, the basement levels of the SoroSuub mining complex were sparsely manned save for the obligatory guards and access controlled elevator. The elevator had been easy enough. A simple touch of the hand was all he needed to pillage the keypad’s forgotten memories. From there on in any guards were far too distracted by his crazy ramblings and high-velocity hot lead to put up too much of a struggle.

The Warrior chuckled to himself as he mentally replayed the scene where one security officer tripped on his own two feet in his haste to wake up from his mid-day nap. Jorm finished setting the last charge and ran back to the nearest set of stairs, only to find it locked and occupied by shouting voices on the other side.

“Stand down or else!”

The Jester merely grinned and let out a loud ringing laugh.

“Oh! You want to play with me? Oh goodie. Here I come!” Jorm yelled as he set a thermal detonator and placed it next to the door. He quickly ran back to safety, laughing as he heard the boom of the explosive. Drawing his slugthrower again, he went back to the staircase and found only charred remains.

“Guys, you need to be a bit more durable if you want to hang around me. *Tsk. Tsk.*” The Jester bound up the stairs and slid back into the main complex, shutting the door behind him.

“Jorm, Zehsaa needs those turrets down. Get on it or I’ll go down there and beat you up myself.” Blade ordered in a not so subtle threat.

“Oh, I’d love to see you try. Come down here and get me.” The Kiffar challenged back as he took out the ignition switch and pressed the button. Muffled booms echoed below him from the gap under the door.

“Zehsaa, Blade. Got you a present. Going to start my rounds around the building now. Want anything?” Jorm joked.

Chapter 4 - A Final Blow

Blade Ta’var ignored the Jester and slipped back into the foreman’s office. Emergency sirens were already going off in the hallways. Jannis banged a fist on the table as he watched the mayhem unfold on his datapad. The Zeltron shut the door behind her and sat on his desk.

“They’ve got in somehow. Can’t we lock everything down?” Blade asked in a serious tone.

“No. That’s in the command center.” The foreman growled.

“And?” The Arcanist arched a brow.

“Well, it’s guarded.”

“I’m a woman of many talents. I’ll get you in.”

“Heh. Don’t I know it.”

“So? Let’s go.” The hot pink Warrior urged him while running her fingers on the back of his neck.

The man paused for a moment and looked nervously at the door. “Fine. You did a great job with the crystals. Let’s see what you can do now.”

“Excellent! Let’s go!” The Arcanist grabbed Jannis by the arm and pulled him along. The pair ran down the hallways past alarmed sentries and technicians alike, skidding to a stop next to a secure door flanked by armed sentinels.

“Need to talk to the boss. It’s urgent!” The foreman argued, trying his best to convince them as he stomped his foot on the ground and made a scene. The Warrior took advantage of the moment and quickly stabbed at the nearest sentinel’s neck with one of her hidden throwing knives. Her weapon sunk into him with a satisfying squish as the guard reached up to his neck in

shock. Blade let go of her dagger and took hold of his gun, aiming it at the other sentry and pulling the trigger back. The other's gun turned to shoot her.

Pew. Pew. Pew.

The other guard fell back with a dull thud, while his partner slumped to the ground as he bleed out. The Sith dispassionately grabbed the access key and handed it to Jannis, who was still shocked.

"Damn. I really do underestimate you." The foreman confessed.

"You know it." The Arcanist winked.

Jannis walked into the control room first, much to the surprise of its occupants. Blade followed closely behind.

"Jannis! What are you doing here? And who is she?!" The boss demanded.

"Your nightmare." The Sith responded.

The Warrior looked into the eyes of the assembled top echelons of the SoroSuub mining corporation and activated her red lightsaber for the first time in several weeks. She rushed forward and carved her way through the SoroSuub executives, paying close attention to the sensitive computer terminals. She swung again and again, sparing none.

"Who are you?!" Jannis asked, fear making his voice shake.

"I'm your savior. My friends and I are taking over this operation and we need a competent man in charge. Want the job?"

The man hesitated for a moment as he stared at the dead bodies on the floor, but he seemed to be looking past them. "Yes. Of course."

"Good. Smart man. Now, get this mess under control. Tell the complex to stand down and I'll call my friends off."

"Sure, sure." The newly minted boss nodded and spoke into the facilities comm system. "This is the SoroSuub Mining Director. Stand down. I repeat. This is the SoroSuub Mining Director. Stand down. All personnel report immediately to the main hall."

"Well, well, Mr. Director. Time to right this ship. Use those amazing ideas you shared with me and pay the miners a bit more, eh?"

“This operation will be moving smoothly within two days. Promise.” Jannis immediately set back to work, making urgent calls and frantically typing away.

“Wonderful. Be right back. One of my friends will reach out to you soon to coordinate our efforts.” Blade gave him an approving nod and walked back to his office.

Jannis’ office was as clean as ever, and her prize was waiting for her right where she left it. She walked to his desk and grabbed the Kyber crystal currently serving as a paperweight. Familiar images passed through her mind much like a bedtime story read over and over again, except this time it had a lot more meaning. She knew the story behind it now and the dangers that came with it.

“Hello precious. Welcome home.” The Sith admired her prize, rubbing a finger against one of its sides.

“Mune, we have the facility. Jannis Zor is now the new director and ready to assist us getting back to smoothly running operation.” Blade reported mechanically into her comlink, already pocketing the crystal and making her way to an available shuttle. It was time to go home.