

Grot *despised* Port Ol'Val.

He'd been issued his billet weeks ago and there was *nothing* to redeem the place.

The heating systems had been damaged in battle against the Triumvirate, so any trip outside of Phantom Complex entailed a dizzying whiplash between heat and cold. This was a minor annoyance to most warm-blooded species, but being Trandoshan it distorted his metabolism, making him feel sluggish and moody. Over time it created a grinding, piercing headache.

On all sides, the cold steel and stone left him feeling claustrophobic and paranoid. The threat of a tunnel collapse lingered in the back of his mind and the fear of decompression left him anxiously on edge. He dearly dreamed for the open sky, the jungle floor, the comforting sensation of dirt beneath his feet, anything but this artificial nightmare.

At all hours there was a constant press of bodies in the street. The stinky, sweaty, soft-skinned humans skittering and chittering here to there like rodents. The bald, bug-eyed Duros shouting in Bocce, hocking their cheap wares on the street corners. The corpulent, slug-like bodies of the Hutts slithering through the tunnels. It was maddening to him that thinking beings could stand to live here in such close proximity. He felt like an insect, like a maggot crawling around in the gut of a lifeless corpse.

Even throwing himself into his training gave him no comfort. The entire complex was in a frenzy of activity as it tried to organize it's newest battleteam. Beady-eyed clerks and administrators rushed to and fro, carrying with them an endless series of transfers, requisitions, reports, memos, and stacks upon stacks of useless paperwork. He had transferred quarters twice in the past weeks, and been issued an endless series of alterations and amendments to his contract.

This place was madness. It was lifeless. It was killing him.

His only comfort was the industrial-sized heat-lamp in his quarters and the few hours he could steal away beneath it in between training. Languishing beneath its warmth the headache faded away and he could forget for a moment how much he despised this place. It was, therefore, a distressing sight, one evening, when he came upon a dark-skinned human in his quarters, dragging his lamp out of its corner

“What? Oh! Sorry, hadn't realized...”

Grot's Vibro-knife was in his hand before he fully realized what he was doing, weeks of frustration finally finding an outlet as he ran at the intruder. Grot swiped at the man, spitting and hissing as he looked for an opening. The man cursed, thinking quickly, and threw the lamp in the way as he scrambled out of the path of the charging Trandoshan.

"Frak! Cool it, leatherneck!" He shouted, backing off towards the wall. Grot growled and pushed the lamp off him, circling closer to his intruder. The man held his hands up in a peaceful gesture, but his eyes never left Grot's blade, "Look here..."

"What are you doing in my quarters soft-skin?" Grot hissed, maneuvering ever closer for a strike.

"Look pal I'm not here to fight you!" he kept one hand up, reaching into his vest to pull out a sheaf of papers, "My name's Milo, I was transferred here this morning. These are my quarters."

"Impossible. These are my quarters," Grot glared at Milo in disbelief, "I've received no notice that I was being transferred"

"Take a look pal, and put that knife down while you're at it. Signed and approved," he warily offered Grot the transfer form and sighed in relief as he lowered the blade. Grot snatched the form from his hand.

"This is a mistake, these are my quarters," Grot snarled.

It was, of course, a mistake. As they would find out, in the chaotic transition to the new battleteam Milo had, quite simply, fallen through the cracks.

"I'm certain it is pal. Trust me. I had no idea this place was taken, and I'm not about to press my luck against a giant lizard. Let's settle this like civilized people and take this downstairs." Milo explained calmly, "no knives needed."

Administration would, of course, refuse to fix it. As they would find out, Milo's transfer was only temporary, and not worth the effort to correct.

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"You see anything up ahead?" Milo whispered, peeking out from behind a ruined wall. Grot scanned along the wide avenue, still strewn with debris and rubble from the heavy

fighting that had taken place here. Empty stores and apartments sat along the edges, ghostlike and abandoned. This whole section of the port had been deserted; cleared out by Arconan forces and marked for reconstruction. The construction wasn't planned to begin for a few weeks yet and, ever pragmatic, house leadership had seen the perfect opportunity for urban combat training lying right on their doorstep. Grot didn't spot any threats up ahead, and the pair made their way further up the street.

"Weird innit?" Milo wondered aloud, "wonder why the higher-ups are so set on these teambuilding exercises?" Grot grunted in response, doing his best to ignore his partner's musings. Since their first meeting, they had talked very little despite being forced to bunk together. They tended to avoid one another whenever possible, Grot to preserve his sanity, and Milo to preserve his neck. Since the official inception of battleteam Voidbreaker, however, they had been ordered to conduct a number of training exercises to 'build team cohesion'. The two bunkmates had, by unfortunate fate, found themselves paired up more often than not.

"I mean it's just unusual right?" Milo continued, "Call me paranoid, but these Arconans don't seem the touchy-feely type right? No way these are just for 'team building' or whatever they want to call it," Milo turned to Grot and sighed with irritation.

"Look, pal, you're going to have to talk to me eventually. You think you're the only one kriffed off about it?" Milo bit out, feeling his frustration rising, "trust me, I didn't sign up to sleep in the same room as a giant death-lizard either. For feth sake, you tried to kill me!" They stopped walking as Milo shouted, his face burning red with resentment. Grot growled, flashing his teeth, and kept walking.

"I did not try to kill you," Grot said after a short silence.

"Then what did you try to do?" Milo spat out, exasperated.

"I tried to cripple you. A captive would be worth many points" Grot smirked, flashing his sharpened teeth "and credits"

Milo smiled sarcastically, "That's much better, thank you. Glad to know my life is so valuable in your view."

"It is not better. The shame of capture would have been very great indeed. Many points lost," Grot explained, looking thoughtful as he ducked through an alley-way.

Milo rolled his eyes, “A shame, And so close to the high-score too. What are you on about with this points spit?” Grot stared at him uncomprehendingly, struggling for an explanation

“Jagganath points. They are... measures of valor, awarded to all by the Great Scorekeeper,” He attempted to explain, “t the end of all things your points shall be tallied, and your place in the afterlife awarded,” he attempted to explain, waving his claw to indicate his difficulty.

“Wonderful, a *religious*, giant death-lizard, very good,” Milo shook his head as they reach the alleyways exit, which spilled out onto a side-street. He paused for a moment.

“Wait, did you try to send me to *Hell*?”

Grot growled, he was not in the mood for a theology lesson. He turned angrily towards Milo, but his rebuke died in his throat as a loud crack pierced the air. He felt a sudden, sharp pain in his side. He stumbled, looking down to catch a glance of the tranquilizer dart that had struck his side. He managed a few steps towards Milo before tumbling to the ground.

His vision blurred and darkness came to claim him.

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Grot awoke to his heart screaming in his chest. His blood pumped like mad as Milo leaned over him, hooking his arms beneath Grot's shoulders. Grot tried to push himself up, but his limbs felt weak and unresponsive, he could only scabble at the floor.

“That's it, leatherneck, wake up! Come on you scaly screw-ball, I can't have you passing out on me.” Milo hauled him to his feet, “I gave you a stimulant, it should fight the effects of the tranquilizer,” Milo paused and shrugged, “Hopefully. I was only trained for Human physiology,” Grot rolled his neck, regaining his bearings and trying to get a fix on the situation.

“Did you see where the shot came from?” he asked, picking up his discarded weapon.

“No idea, I was too concerned with hauling your limp body into the alley,” Milo responded sarcastically, “You were shot in your left side, they're further up the street in that direction but I don't know exactly.”

Milo watched warily as Grot pulled out his Vibro-knife and held it out near the exit of the alleyway. Grot studied the neatly polished knife closely for a moment, before sliding it back into the sheath.

“They’re above a drug-store at the far end, two floors up.”

“That’s a load of Kark, no way you could see that through a reflection,” Milo raised an eyebrow incredulously.

Grot snorted, “I can not, at least, not as you could. I spotted an unusual heat signature in one of the windows, Perhaps the previous owner left their oven on, but there is a good chance that is our assailant.”

“A joke,” Milo stared blankly at Grot “Maybe I got tranquilized instead, this definitely feels like a dream,” He gathered his equipment, chuckling all the way, and made ready at the exit.

“I’m with you leatherneck, time to make that god of yours proud.”

“Goddess.”

“Whatever, leatherneck.”

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The door slammed shut.

“I got my transfer orders,” Milo said simply, placing a sheaf of papers down on the table. Grot stretched himself out underneath his heat-lamp, rolling over onto his side.

“Quartermaster says I’m shipping out tomorrow, first boat on the way to Selen.” Milo coughed and tapped his foot. An awkward silence passed as Grot languished, pushing himself up into a sitting position and snapping his jaws a few times.

“Sith-spit leatherneck! Now’s the time where you pretend to be sad about it and offer to take me out for a drink,” Milo glared at Grot as he got up from his sitting position and turned off the lamp. The Trandoshan walked over and placed a heavy claw on Milo’s shoulder, towering over him and looking down with bright orange eyes.

“Milo, you are a hunter of worth, and I am proud to have known you. We shall go to the places of celebration and have the musicians strike up a song, we will dance until the early morning so all may know your skill as I have, and they will whisper your name for days to come!” Grot proclaimed, letting a rare, genuine smile creep onto his face.

“Would any of that happen to include going out for a drink with some cheap floozies?” Milo smiled cheekily, grabbing his jacket and making his way out the door.

Grot smiled broadly and followed Milo out, marveling at the difference a few weeks could make. The heating was still damaged. The feeling of claustrophobia would never go away. The press of people was as bewildering and unsavory as ever.

And yet...

This station, this battleteam... Perhaps It was not so lifeless as he first thought.

He could live.