

Sharp, metallic clangs echoed through the crowded training room of the *Voidbreaker*. On the large open mat in the center of the room, two warriors circled each other, growling and cursing as they fought. An emerald-eyed Iktochi thrust her vibroaxe forward with a wild shout and was turned aside by the pauldron of her armored opponent. The heavily-clad Trandoshan turned on his heel, knocking her blade away with a flash of his silver sword. The Iktochi merely danced back away from him, far swifter without such weighty protection

“Stand and fight!” The Trandoshan hissed, snarling as he felt exhaustion beginning to take over

“That’s amusing coming from you, Grot!” The Iktochi shouted back “You’re not always going to have that jetpack of yours, you need to learn mobility, strength, endurance! That armor will only protect you so long in a clash of blades.”

Grot growled, pulling up the visor of his helmet and spitting on the mat. He wiped his chin and fixed her with a glare. “Certainly, *Mistress Decima*,” he said mockingly.

Decima stared back, anger filling her eyes. “That’s enough cheek out of you!”

Grot merely grunted in response, and with a heavy sigh Decima broke off the spar and made for the nearby benches. The two sat, glad to be off their aching feet, and had some water and light food to satisfy themselves before the next round. Grot took the moment to breathe without his helmet and loosened the straps on his breastplate.

“It’s going to take a lot of work to get you battle ready before we reach Port Ol’Val,” Decima mused, “Since you insist on wearing that monstrous thing.”

“You might have more time to prepare me if you did not skulk off every time we are in port” Grot snapped back, his voice low and oddly threatening. The air seemed to chill for a moment as Decima regarded him, her eyes narrowing.

“What are you implying,” she asked, her voice sharp as steel.

“I imply nothing,” the Trandoshan replied impetuously, “You have been spending a lot of time alone on Port Ol’Val. I speak only truth.”

“Your words are true, but the sentiment behind them worries me. If you have a quarrel with me be brave enough to say it to my face!” The Iktochi shouted, leaping to her feet with her blade in hand. Grot responded in kind, bringing his sapphire blade out from its sheath.

“I shall be direct, then. Children have disappeared from port Ol’Val.” This insinuation seemed to cut deep into Decima, and she dropped her blade slightly, “Since the time you begin skulking off more and more have begun to disappear. I followed you last time, and you did not exactly keep to the cleanest parts of the station, nor was your company very reputable. You are involved in

this, somehow, as your student, I have a right to know.”

Decima considered him seriously, deeply in thought. She took a moment of contemplation before she answered him. “I often forget how perceptive you are, Grot, but I assure you I have nothing to do with this— “

“And am I supposed to believe you!?”

Decima cried with sudden fury, sweeping her leg underneath Grot and knocking him to the ground. The Trandoshan went tumbling to the durasteel floor, grunting in pain as the air rushed from his lungs. Decima held her vibroaxe to his neck and growled.

“You are supposed to believe that I have the best interests of the Clan at heart!” she turned away, a look of genuine betrayal on her face, “And you are supposed to believe that I have more honor than to kidnap children.”

Grot was silent for a long time as the Iktochi removed her blade and walked back to the training mat.

“Mistress, I— “

“Quiet, Grot. You still have a long way to go. I knocked you down with a single strike and you didn't even try to retaliate. Remember that the protection your armor gives you is a blessing, but also a weakness!”

“Yes, Mistress.”