

The Climb

“Really?” Leeadra said, looking at him incredulously. “I give you some leave and you’re going to waste it there?”

Grot shrugged and gave a noncommittal grunt. “It is something i have always wanted to do, since I visited Selen. Is there some sort of problem with me going there?” The Trandoshan raised an eyebrow and gave the Pantoran a flat look. She matched his gaze for a moment, before looking down with a small chuckle.

“I’ve learned not to question your... eccentricities. I guess I should just be glad you didn’t book a shuttle to Dathomir to go hunt rancors.”

“If that is on the table...”

The blue skinned woman gave a sudden, barking laugh and quickly signed Grot’s leave form. “Too late! Your request for leave has been approved. Enjoy yourself, Grot.” She gave him a sincere smile.

“And thank you, sincerely. You deserve it.”

Grot snorted suddenly, shaking himself awake. He blearily blinked his eyes, and took a look outside the flap of his tent. The sun was up, and slowly beginning to rise towards its zenith in the sky. *I must have overslept.*

The Trandoshan pulled his coat tightly around himself, feeling the chill of the air outside. He grabbed the heated blanket he’d picked up in Estle City and wrapped it around his shoulders, trying to warm himself up and kick-start his metabolism. In the meantime he prepared his equipment for the day, packing up his rations and camping gear so he could start the day’s hike.

If he wanted to reach the summit before sunset he would have to hurry.

Newly warmed and ready to go, Grot packed up his tent and reveled mountain air. There was a gentle breeze from the east, and a flock of murky, grey clouds threatened rain later in the evening. Rather, it would be snow. This far up the mountain he had already passed the snow line a long time ago.

The mercenary swung his backpack on and started up the rest of the way to the summit. The climb didn’t promise to be particularly difficult, but it would take several hours. Moreover, he had to keep constant track of his body temperature and oxygen — Trandoshans weren’t particularly well adapted to high altitudes.

Grot had never liked cities. They were big, crowded, and smelled like death. He didn't anticipate that Estle City would change this perception much as he rode the shuttle down Dusk Station. The sooner he got away from this duty posting the better. He looked outside the shuttle's viewport, seeing if he couldn't of the city before the landed, and was astounded by what he saw. A colossal mountain, stretching up towards the sky where its peak grew white and snowy, casting a great shadow over the entire island beneath it. It burned red in the sunset, a great golden mane of light surrounding it as the sun set behind. The starport looked positively miniscule, a tiny collection of lights struggling against its immensity.

"Where is Estle City?" Grot asked the pilot, slightly confused.

"On the other side of Doto Peak, the starport is on this side of the mountain for security reasons, sir."

"So we travel around it to get to the city?" The Trandoshan questioned, happy that he might have something to enjoy about this trip.

"No sir, directly underneath. There's a tunnel straight through the mountain."

The mercenary frowned, slightly disappointed, and turned back towards the window.

Grot shook his head violently, almost tripping over his own foot as he dozed off. He snorted, and reached into his bag for another heating pack. He cracked the little glass vial inside the pack with a twist of his claws, and waited for the chemicals inside to start heating up. Pleased, he shoved the pack inside his coat and enjoyed the warmth and energy flowing through his being.

The cold was clearly starting to get to him, but he was so close now. The climb was starting to level out, becoming flatter and flatter as he approached the summit. Up ahead he could see a dark stone monument over the next rise which marked the top of the mountain, dedicated to Mejas Doto. He picked up the pace, rushing the last few strides.

Then he stopped, and stared.

The sky was ablaze with color as the sun began to set on the horizon. The yellow ball of fire changed to hues of orange, and then almost tangerine. The clouds were a brilliant pink and purple, as though embarrassed to behold the beauty before them. Silhouettes of birds flew home across the sky, dark little stars to match the bright and glorious one behind them.

Below along the mountains other face, Estle hummed with activity. The rings of the cities were packed with people, going along their business, and happily ignoring the sunset right before their eyes. Grot was content to ignore them in just the same way

He took a few stumbling steps towards the monument and sat, waiting there until darkness finally came.