

Part 1: The Reception

“Now *this* is some crazy wicked banthashit,” Morgan murmured into his partner’s ear, his voice low and conspiratorial. His bright blue eyes were wide as they took in the scene around them, drinking in every detail with a mischievous glimmer.

It was like a toy store on life day...if toy stores happened to stock lasers, blasters, rotary-slug throwers and a vast array of other deadly implements. They’d been dropped off by one of the Summit’s personal shuttles, a plush, chromium plated XJ-6 Speeder that Morgan once would have killed to jack and sell. Anywhere else, the vehicle would have been ostentatious. Here, among the richest and deadliest people in the galaxy, however, it blended in perfectly. The soft red carpet that he and his partner stepped out onto as they made their way into the expo, guiding them along their path, seemed delightfully appropriate as well. It was like a river of blood, pulling them along; and the people that surrounded them drew their lives and fortunes from it.

He’d been to black markets before, places where hyper-deadly wares had been hocked like protein packets and cheap whores on the Coruscanti streets. He’d broken into armoury shows, tipped the bidding on high-brow auctions, and he’d once even seduced his way into a bargaining war between two Hutt cartels. But, what he saw laid out before him was a combination of all three, with about ten billion credits thrown into the pot as well. The red carpet marched down a beautiful, marble-vaunted hallway, high ceilings carrying the sounds of a distant chamber orchestra amidst the low hum of voices. This had once been a palace, he was pretty sure. Or, a museum of some kind. Now, it had been converted to a glitzy resort, a place for the high and mighty to gather. Alongside priceless sculptures and light-paintings, the Galaxy’s most powerful arms consortiums had laid out their wares. The galleries near the entrance had been reserved for “*smaller*” corporations. Smaller, in this case, meant arms companies with only a *few million* credits in the bank, and *modest* mercenary armies at their back. Walking by their exhibitions made the difference seem petty. A Rodian spokesman for Baktoid Armor Systems held the attention of a small crowd, displaying a line heavy ballistic-ablative suits painted a deep, jet black. Across the hall, a few representatives from Kelvarek Consolidated were guiding a long, multiracial line of arms purveyors past a set of display cases, holding the corporation’s best; mini-rocket launchers, wrist rockets, and a variety of different warheads to pick and choose from.

Get the Rep’s attention, maybe with Bugs. The display cases will have automatic biometric alarms. Could probably lift a vocal sample and a handprint from one of the reps.

Morgan blinked, and shook the idea away. That wasn’t what he had come here for...what he’d been hired for. From the way that his partner glanced at him, one dark eyebrow rising, she could probably see exactly what he’d been thinking.

"You know the orders, Desatado. No sticky fingers until we make it to the objective," Emere Galo chided, her face a stoic mask. Morgan rolled his eyes in response, casually linking an arm around her waist as he did.

"Not even a *little*? They've got prototypes all over this place; one or two of 'em could be a useful grab, extra credits. Y'know Morra wanted to pick up another class at the academy..."

"Not happening. We're keeping this simple, and taking the payout as-is. If you wanna help Morra pick up another class, you can enlist," she suggested curtly, humor in her dark eyes. Morgan stifled a chuckle at that idea. He'd do anything for their daughter, but joining up with the Arconan Armed Forces was a stretch. He was far more effective as an...independent contractor, loosely affiliated. It gave him a little bit more wiggle room.

As they crossed down the hallway, past more multi-million credit exhibitions and more throngs of suited corporate operatives, he turned his eyes back to their search. He flagged points of interest in his mind; fire exits, checkpoints for the exhibition's security, ventilation shafts, turbolifts, and side-passages. Places to escape, places to hide, places to blend in. Mostly, however...he watched the people around them. All of the representatives thronging the smaller booths were probably corporate intermediaries, agents sent to bid and buy in the place of a more powerful executive or political operative. They were of a multitude of races, spoke dozens upon dozens of languages, and wore a vast array of different styles. Suits and dresses in the former Imperial style were the most popular, though he could pick out an Umbaran woman in the dark, gauzy robes favored by the Crymorah Syndicate, and a slimy human that couldn't have been anything but an agent for the Hapan Consortium.

There would be Black Suns, here. Agents for the Hutts, to, if the slugs themselves hadn't decided to show up. Morgan felt his trigger finger itch at the thought...but, none of the people here were armed, at least not outwardly. Security was incredibly tight. Guards everywhere, watching the crowds like starhawks. One might have found it odd, considering that this was an *Armory Show*, after all. But, since the Collective had hit Arx hard, no one was taking any chances. The largest consortiums provided the bulk of security, with a select contingent of the Iron Fleet overseeing operations. Yet, Morgan and Emere had snuck by with a few weapons held in reserve. The Expo looked like a tough nut to crack...

But they were going to steal from it. Or, more specifically, they were going to cheat, lay a few hands on the scale for Arcona. Emere had come dressed to impress, in the finest livery offered to an officer of the AAF. Her slate-grey dress uniform was decked with golden piping, a set of silver medals shining upon her chest. Morgan was posing as her intermediary, and plus one. His suit was...distinctly non-military. A chalky-white two-piece, the tight jacket's collar opened to an ink-black undershirt, into which he had tucked a variety of illicit tools. A crimson, Queen's Heart bloom was stuck into the lapel, tilting at a roguish angle. He'd slipped his stun-sticks up his sleeves, ready to slide into his hands at a flick of his wrist. The two blasters that he normally carried had been left behind. For this job, he carried only one; a slim Ec-17 Hold-Out Blaster, belted to the small of his back. Hopefully, he wouldn't need anything bigger.

Emere was to be presented as Arcona's primary negotiator. The largest arms corporation at the Expo -Blas-Tech- was going to be unveiling something. Something *big*, that would send ripples through the industry. She had been instructed to meet with Blas-Tech's representatives, and start negotiations for access to the tech. It could give the clan a massive advantage over their adversaries, even within the Brotherhood itself. Arcona was still riding the high of the war, after another incredibly successful endeavor. With a canny purchase, they could cement their position. Morgan's job was...far less official. Really, he was Emere's assistant, in a way. He had been assigned to provide whatever help he could manage through under-the-table means, bring power to Arcona's bargain by stealing from Blas-Tech's rivals, obtaining valuable data through a little bit of corporate espionage. Schematics, bribes, blackmail; anything that could help. And, if Emere couldn't secure what the clan was looking for through official channels...he would be the one to infiltrate Blas-Tech's headquarters within the Expo, and take what they needed.

The job was risky. They were running right under the nose of the Iron Throne, of some of the most powerful corporations in the galaxy. If it didn't go without a hitch, both of them could have ended up dead. But... the pay-out would secure a future for their daughter. For Morra.

And, it was a damned good challenge.