

The Heist: Team Loud & Shroud

Team:

Sulith Bekett (15115)

- Sully:
<https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/members/15115/snapshots/3643/6319>
- Eilen:
https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/non_player_characters/560/snapshots/3645/6321

Sera Kaern (15689)

- Sera:
<https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/members/15689/snapshots/3647/6324>
- Morgan:
https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/non_player_characters/778/snapshots/3655/6334

Editing document:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1llcPnvLsiHJOQ93g2Y3qJ7yETI5xeuKUecyue-YWgV8/edit>

The holotable re-lit the makeshift planning room with an echoing ring as blue lights took shape. Sully leaned forward and squinted, both curious and cautious about the Hutt-designed building on display. Eilen smiled sheepishly at Sera across the table and offered a tiny wave. Her friend grinned back and returned the gesture. Morgan cleared his throat as obnoxiously as possible with a feigned incidental gesture toward the half-Bothan.

Eilen winced and dropped her gaze at the sudden attention. Right away, her hands whipped back to the control panel and inserted a small datadisk. Trails and icons in several bright colors emerged across the hologram of the Hutt palace.

After a long breath, Morgan spoke up. "All these lil' red bits you're seein' are where Py'zah's gun-totin' schuttas hang out on duty. As you can see, they gotta pretty solid chunk 'round here." His hand circled loosely over a room deep in the palace, partially buried. One of the walls color-shifted to green. "The recon provided by this wily furball and *yours truly* tells us that this is Py'zah's vault, and it's guarded by a lot of expensive tech, on top of all these overpriced frackholes."

Eilen began counting on her fingers. "They've got heavy duty rifles, explosive cannons, some kind of private comm network... and the vault isn't gonna be a quick lockpicking job. Might take a little while."

“Point is, breakin’ in head-on is gonna be a one-way tick’ to Karkstreet, so obviously that’s a no-go. ‘Sides, we can do better.” Morgan shot his fingers toward Sera and Sully. “There’s where you two come in. *You* are Team Loud.”

Sully’s brow lifted as Sera’s grin widened.

“Py’zah’s personal sin-center is across the complex,” the merc continued, gesturing toward a much more open area. “Not too far from the public halls where all his favorite cred-totin’ and ass shakin’ guests tend to, uh, *conglomerate* for totally legit’ business and bask in his flabby, cheese-molded glory. That makes it an ideal place to cause a lotta chaos *and* force his frackin’ worshipfulness into a hidey hole.”

Sera’s grin twisted as she squinted at the space. “That’s a lot of doors in and out.”

“That’s a lotta *escape routes* for you and the lion — lioness? Whatever — to get the hell outta the frackshow and pull a stripper-yacht’s worth of pissed sec-grunts behind you. The more noise you guys can make—” Morgan’s hand circled back around to the vault room. “—the more of these jackwads shift priorities and relocate.”

“It’s, uh... really crude, we know,” Eilen mentioned, rubbing her knuckles, “a-and I hate to ask you guys to, you know, get shot at...”

Sully dismissed the thought with a lazy wave of his giant hand. “Ahh, we’ll be fine.”

“Yeah!” Sera piped up. “Mercs like this won’t stand against some good K’thiri. And anyone working for a Hutt in this kind of business is practically begging for a steel-toed boot to the nads.”

“I can get you the shots,” Sully mused.

Eilen blinked, ears dropping slightly. “...Right.”

“You guys gonna need to work out a battle plan of your own?” Morgan asked.

Sera shrugged. “Maybe. We can figure it out.”

“As long as it’s somethin’,” Morgan figured. “So, while you two are disturbin’ the peace and causin’ untold expenses in property damage, Team Shroud — me and Eilen — should have a hell of an easier time getting into the vault without gettin’ caught pants-frackin’-down. A few peepin’ toms at most, but we’ll bring a good eye poker, and then it’s just a matter of kickin’ in the door.”

Eilen shook herself back to full attention. “Uh, yeah. And we’ve only got one way out, so... If you guys can, uh, *not* lead them... around here...” Her lanky arm dragged a course through a few corridors. “...that would be super.”

“Don’t worry,” Sera said with a wink. “I got your tail covered.”

“We all clear?” Morgan spoke out, hands spread. When no one objected, they clapped together. “Then let’s do it. Get your toys, and we’ll head out soon.”

“So...Team Loud,” Sully mumbled as the duo dashed through the Garganta Galleria’s garishly opulent halls. Their aforementioned toys made their approach *loud* indeed, each footstep accompanied by the clatter of armor and bundled weaponry. Despite that fact, they had only been attacked by a half-dozen guards on their way towards the Py’zah’s throne, guards that had put up only a half-hearted defense before being dealt with as conspicuously as Sera and Sully could possibly have managed. “Should we have...a plan? For how loud to be?”

“I mean...not really?” Sera responded quizzically, casting a glance over her shoulder as they ran. She was at the lead, guiding their path by ‘*ear*’. That meant feeling in the Force for the densest concentration of life that she could find, which would certainly be the crux of Py’zah’s defenses, and shooting straight for it. “It’s kinda like kicking a rheed in the bungole. No matter how hard you kick, you’ll be getting its attention *real quick*.”

“...Have you actually done that?” Sully questioned, shaggy brow rising.

“*No*. Respect nature,” she replied quickly, horned head shaking.

“But it’s okay to kick a slaver’s bungole,” the Togorian stated after a moment. *That*, in turn, earned a wide grin from the Zabrak.

“Of *course it is*,” she affirmed with a savage, anticipatory grin. “It’s only honorable. Ancestors...we could even make a good contest out of it.”

“Kicking bungoles?”

“Smashing *anything*. Bungole, bolas, sausage. Long as it’s south, and they keep living. Throw a little twist into the whole thing,” Sera suggested, brow wriggling mischievously. Sully seemed to ponder that for a moment, scarred face twisting in thought. Then, his face lit up in a grin, lips pulling away to bare rows of pointed fangs.

“Sounds like a plan to me,” he agreed affably, rolling thick, muscle-chorded shoulders as he said it, massive hammer gleaming in his hand. Sera nodded at their harmonious accord, the

groans of stricken-pirates yet to be struck echoing in her mind...alongside signatures in the Force. Immediately, her grin shrank down, trust dagger and sapphire blade flying into her hands.

“Coming up on the spot! Four, thirty feet around the corner...just like earlier, Sully!” she stated quickly, her voice dropping low. The massive Togorian responded with a quick nod, falling in at her side. Their pace slowed as they maneuvered, Sully picking up to run just in front of Sera and to her right, his massive shield rising before them. Just as they turned the corner, their pace picked up to a sprint.

The security ahead turned and saw two heavily armed figures approaching at a dead tilt, a heavy shield held out before them, and a white cloak billowing around them. One armored wrist peeked around the side of Sully’s shield, unleashing a flurry of yellow blaster bolts from its silvery vambrace. The shots, though inaccurate, exploded against one man’s solar plexus, dropping him steaming to the floor, with returning fire glancing ineffectually from Sully’s shield.

Then, they were right on top of them. Sera whirled languidly out of the protection of her friend’s shield, swiping a guard’s out-thrust blaster rifle from out of her way with her crystalline blade, momentum never ceasing. Her silvery dagger flashed, cutting beneath the armpit and forcing him to drop the blaster as the arm’s tendon was cut, just before she thrust her armored elbow into the front of his open faced helm. As he staggered backwards, she wasted no time in circling her right foot around and straight between his legs, the *heavy* crescent kick slamming between his legs toe-up.

Sully preferred simpler methods. On the right, he smacked his opponent in the gut with the lip of his shield, doubling him over, before swiftly swinging his hammer in an uppercut motion. Suffice it to say, the blow lifted his opponent fully into the air, via the groin, and slammed him into Sera’s doubled-over foe.

That left the fourth man...who, having watched what had happened to his friends, made the wise decision and ran for his, and his future children’s, lives.

“Score’s tied,” Sera stated amiably as she turned to the door at their side. The corridor itself was as plushly furnished as a palace, though the battle that was raging within and without had diminished its beauty, somewhat. Smoke stained the walls and ceiling, tinged with the acrid stench of billowing blaster discharges and burning flesh, and numerous pools of blood marred the gorgeous marble tiling. Drag marks indicated that bodies had been moved from this location before — likely those of past, unfortunate defenders.

That left them, and the door. Sera tried the keypad and found it sealed, of course. Her two attempted combinations of *1234567* and *8008135* didn’t work to unlock it, either. It was a massive, eight-foot tall slab of gilded durasteel, embossed with a relief of Py’zah in all his abominous glory, chained slaves groveling beneath his flab. At that sight, Sully scowled, hefting his hammer, turning to Sera as she drew her lightsaber.

“Should we have, like...a battlecry? Something?”

“Nah,” Sera responded, brow furrowing as she ignited her weapon’s shining golden blade and began to slice down the door’s length. On the other side, she could hear sudden gasps of fear. “Just be loud...and stay with me. We’ve got this...together.”

“Together,” Sully affirmed as she finished cutting with her saber. He gave her a grin, hammer rising *high*. Then, he brought it down against the door’s center, right where she had sliced. Heavy repulsor generators turned an already massive blow into one of titanic, seismic force, ripping the door from it’s weakened hinges and sending the two heavy chunks flying into the room.

Sully followed them with a flashbang.

“TOGETHER!” Sera belted, pointed teeth bared as she dashed forward, blades raised high. “INVICTA!”

“LOOOOOOOOUUUUD!” Sully replied, deafeningly.

Their battlecries were greeted by a chorus of terrified shouts soon muffled by blasterfire.

Whatever Team Loud was doing, it seemed to be working. Guards filed hastily out of the passage that led to the vault, no more than a few feet from where Eilen was pressed against a wall, cloaked. She risked moving her head in front of the door when no more were running out and confirmed the hall was clear.

Eilen took a moment to breathe deep and send Morgan a simple telepathic message: a feeling which urged him toward her.

The foreign sensation in his head wasn’t exactly comfortable, but Morgan followed the wordless signal. At least invasive Force messages couldn’t be picked up by a hidden comm scanners. And what a relief it was to get moving; he’d been killing time in the back of a broom closet for nearly an hour. It took no shortage of patience to sneak so deeply into Py’zah’s palace without the power to literally turn invisible, but it was finally Morgan’s time to shine.

With the coast clear, the merc hurried to rejoin his furry teammate. He barely caught sight of the last two guards running down a far corridor before slipping into the passage toward the vault. As he reached the end, Eilen faded into view with her back to a hiding place — just across an open gap in the vault room where any remaining guards would see him walk out. From behind his current corner of safety, he shot her a crooked look and twisted his hands out at her.

Eilen's ears flickered up, and she started trying to respond in what Morgan could only assume was her best attempt to emulate some manner of military sign language. It might as well have been a foreign language. He just shrugged at her. Eilen rolled her head as if in a dramatic sigh, then closed her eyes and went still. After a few seconds, her voice brushed through his thoughts.

Two guys left. I think we can lure—

Morgan shot Eilen a thumbs up mid-sentence and rolled around the corner with his silenced Westar in hand just as she started to convey a plan of action. Her telepathy was cut short as he pulled the trigger on the first guard, and she winced again as the second guard went down with his gun half-drawn. With a proud smirk, Morgan blew the smoke from his blaster's elongated barrel and re-holstered it.

The vault's exterior was certainly no joke. True to their gathered intel, nearly the entire back wall of the room was loaded with layers of heavily reinforced locks that were undoubtedly thicker than the length of a lightsaber's blade. Of course, Py'zah wouldn't have made it easy for even Force-users, or anyone with access to one of the old laser-swords, to break in. If Eilen was right about his security though, the two duracrete workstands on either side of the room fitted with access terminals, among several other devices, contained everything she needed to crack it open.

Eilen tilted around from her hiding place to see the fresh bodies. She grimaced, then gave Morgan a slanted look. "Guess that works, too."

"Sometimes, jus' gotta keep it simple," Morgan said as he strode confidently forward. "Sides, these schuttas are slavers. Doin' everyone else a favor. And your girlfriend and the cat are makin' way too much noise upstairs for anyone to notice."

Her head sank an inch as she tried not to look directly at him. "...Sh-she's... not my girlfriend."

"Yeeaahh, I don't buy that," Morgan thought aloud as he started moving the bodies out of the way.

Eilen sighed hard and stepped toward one of the access terminals. "I mean... it—it's complicated. We're like... uh... Well, we're not girlfriends, I don't think. Unless—ugh, just nevermind."

"You just can't do simple, can ya?"

She sighed and dropped her bag as she sat at the terminal. "I wish... Sorry, I just— I've been having a really bad week, even before all... *this*." Eilen briefly gestured to the vault before digging out her collection of slicing tools.

“...So,” she started again, after a moment of silence. “This table of stuff is quite the mess, huh? I mean, it looks like a lot of rigs separate from the main security system, trying to botch in more walls or something.”

Morgan dusted his hands as he dropped the bodies one on top of the other. “So, ya like her a lot, obviously. Why not just ask her out?”

Eilen groaned quietly. Her change of subject would have been preferred. “I mean, I... kinda did? We’ve... not really *dated*, but like... I dunno.” Her ears flickered low. “I just... So, she’s *really* into warrior people, and fighting, and hunting, and that whole sort of lifestyle, and it’s just not me, so... ugh. She’s a really good friend, honestly more than that, but I dunno if she really likes me the same way. I mean, just last week, she ran off from this festival with like *three* other people who were all totally her type...” After a pause, it occurred to her she’d stopped working, and quickly resumed setting up her computer probe and decoder.

By the time Eilen glanced back over at Morgan, it was clear the gears were turning in his head. The cocksure look on his face was just as much a curiosity as it was concerning.

“SO,” he finally started, loudly, “my thinkin’ is, she’s a Zabrak. Real fierce, primal-like, live for the thrill of blood an’ action — you gotta point. You wanna hook her? You gotta find a way to get her heart racin’, adrenaline pumpin’ like crazy.” Morgan tapped his foot, then nodded to himself as he grinned. “So, break into her house.”

Eilen’s entire body stopped moving as that registered. “Wh— *excuse me?!?*”

“Yeah! Just think about it: Her fight-or-flight frackin’ skyrockets. That’s what gets her goin’, ain’t it? Hell, for bonus points, you could do it naked, really send her mind spinnin’. Ooh, and Zabraks love challenges, ‘specially when ya make it personal. So here’s a plan, ya start stealin’ her underwear—”

“NOPE. Nope. Mm-mm, just...” Eilen’s head shook almost violently, her face hot under her fur. “Thanks, but hard pass.”

Morgan shrugged. “What, too intense? Ah, you might warm up to it. Here, I got a more rookie plan you might like—”

“*I think...* I’ll just keep suffering, thanks.” Her burning ears folded away from him as she tried to focus in on the flashing digits and keystrokes. The screen before her relented only moments later. *Thank the fracking stars.*

Lights around the vault shifted colors, signifying a standby state. Nothing opened. Eilen blinked and looked back at the screen. “...Uhh... That should have been it— wait...” One of the other devices around the workstation lit up, demanding a password. Her throat knotted.

“What’s wrong?” Morgan hurried over to look for himself.

Eilen looked down at her decoder and tried a few keystrokes. No progress, but her attempt painted a picture. “This isn’t supposed to be part of the system. Uhh... D-don’t try to touch it. It looks like it’s waiting for a spoken phrase, but it needs a specific voice. And... I think it’s got a suicide contingency.”

Morgan’s mouth twisted.

“It gives you one shot,” Eilen clarified. “If it’s wrong, it self-destructs all the keys and, uh, who knows what else happens. Usually irreversible; super expensive problem if you screw it up. It, uh... It might take a while to get a work-around for his voice signature, but I can probably dig up the password if there’s—”

She stopped mid-sentence as Morgan pried off a panel on the side of the terminal. “W-wait, what are you doing?”

He shrugged. “You said it yourself, most of this crap don’t belong. So it’s simple: we just take it out.” A smirk spread over half his face as he spotted no shortage of clearly foreign components plugged through several adapters into the motherboard. “Ah, that’d be it.”

Eilen nearly jumped. “No, Morgan!”

The merc pulled the cords out without a second thought. The other devices in front of them flashed error messages while the screen demanding a voice command lit up with a statement to initiate something called *Lone Star* Protocol.

Eilen’s surprise turned into a sudden but tense curiosity as she stared at the words. “I have a bad feeling about this...” The Force seemed to agree, because it immediately warned of a threat from behind her. She barely had time to shriek as a mounted repeating blaster sprung out from the ceiling and aimed itself toward her and Morgan. “Get down!”

Morgan rolled as Eilen dove over the terminals, a shower of plasma pellets lighting up the chair and terminal just as they took cover behind the workstation. Eilen flinched as sparks showered overhead. Morgan hit the back of his head against their cover and exhaled hard.

“Kriff,” he muttered. “That other terminal active?”

“Y-yeah? Why?”

“Alright, good.” With their infiltration already compromised, Morgan opened his communicator to Team Loud. “Hey, friends. We gots a problem...”

Another mercenary went flying backwards, their guttural groan of pain cutting off with an ugly *crunch* as they slammed bonelessly into a bank of slot machines, flopping unconscious to the floor alongside the heavy mechanical terminals. “Six!” Sully grunted, his voice triumphant. He’d nailed the man right between the legs, the powerhammer’s repulsors launching his target in a smooth arc across the room.

Not to be outdone, Sera sent one of the two guards that she’d been dueling with skidding across the central gambling hall’s once-shining marble floor with a telekinetic shove. That gave her room to deflect her remaining opponent’s electrobaton away with a swipe of her sapphire blade, pushing forward a half-second later and thrusting her elbow into his throat. While he staggered backwards, choking, she chambered her kick.

A sudden *screech* of warning sounded in the back of her mind. Preternaturally fast, the Zabrak fell into a full-split, dropping just beneath the spray of blasterfire that would have blown her head off, and presenting her with a perfect target. The Force flowed into her, coursing through her lithe musculature, surging behind the powerful uppercut that she launched directly into the gasping pirate’s groin. The force of the blow sent him upwards and stumbling backward into a groaning, retching heap.

“Seven!” Sera cried.

“Showoff,” Sully retorted. Casually, the massive Togorian hefted his betaplast shield up, absorbing the streams of plasma blasted his way as he crossed back to Sera’s side. He didn’t so much as flinch, plasma splashing across the shield as if Py’zah’s agents were throwing sand, not trying to blast the two of them to oblivion. Still, as Sera went for cover, he followed, not about to soak up more shots than necessary.

Sera and Sully had thrown the remnants of the Hutt’s security into absolute chaos, blitzing onto the main gambling floor with the fire and fury of several times their number. They had put the mercs on the defensive, confused them, and badly bloodied them. Their true losses were perhaps double or triple the thirteen that the duo was keeping track of. Not *every* one could be taken down with a shot to the sack, and non-lethality was difficult to attain. Still, bloody corpses lay alongside groaning wounded, only adding to the tumultuous din.

“Think this is, uh, loud enough?” Sully questioned after a moment, thick hair falling across his scarred face as he looked down at Sera. She’d ducked behind a half-shattered sabacc table, idly flipping her Zabradi dagger round in her hand as they caught their breath.

“You wanna...” The Togorian raised one heavily furred mitt and made a sort of mystical gesture in her general direction.

Sera gave him a grin, blue eyes blinking shut for just a moment, brow furrowing as she focused, and focused hard.

Life. Fear. Anger. *Lots* of anger. They had certainly gotten their attention.

“Well...they know about us. *Everyone* in the casino knows about us, and there’s a lot of angry people heading our way. So, yeah, I think we’ve been loud enough,” she stated, cocking her horned head to one side.

“Too loud?” the Togorian asked, bracing his shield against her cover as another burst of blasterfire scoured its surface. Carefully, he replaced his massive hammer in the sheath across his back, drawing the heavy pistol from the holster at his hip. He didn’t need both hands to aim, thankfully; the laser sight did its job well. Squeezing down on the trigger, Sully sent an emerald burst of blasterfire straight into one exposed guard’s groin, a grin sprawling over his face. Score was tied, again.

“No such thing...but, we might wanna make our exit, or they’re gonna be *right* up our butts. As much as I’d love to meet ‘em halfway, rack up more points...not our mission,” Sera sighed. Peeking out around her cover, she launched a perforce few blasts with her vambrace, driving the pirates that were taking potshots at them back behind their protection. “Go with the original plan. You smoke the place, I cut out through the side wall, and we link up with Team Shroud. Nice and eaaaaasy...”

Before Sera could go on any longer, her wrist-link vibrated, loud enough to draw her and Sully’s attention through the cacophony of the fight. Slowly, she raised it to her ear, nodding along to a muffled, static-ridden voice from the other end.

“Yeah! Yeah, things are going great,” she replied, drawing a curious glance from Sully. As if in reply, a few of Py’zah’s goons let loose with a barrage of plasma bolts, blasting through Sera’s cover. Almost idly, she scooted to her right just before they ripped into her, exhaling through her nose.

“More incoming, Sully,” Sera stated casually, shoulders rolling. Then, once again into her comm-link; “Uh...change of plans? Is that a *good* change, or a *bad* change?”

“They’re here!” Sully affirmed from her flank, shifting closer to her. Across the gambling floor, a dozen new opponents poured in from the opposite end of the room. These weren’t the lightly armed security agents they had been facing before. No, these were genuine, crimson-armored Guavian Death Gangers, with the heavy weaponry to boot. They didn’t wait behind cover, clustered around Py’zah’s overturned dais like the other security forces. Instead, they charged directly for the duo’s small chunk of cover, heavy Tostovin blasters whirring.

Sully grunted as the blood-red bolts slammed against his shield. They detonated with explosive force, sliding the Togorian backwards, his muscular bulk straining to keep him

standing. He barely ducked before his grip on the shield slipped beneath the weight of the barrage. It hit the ground some feet away as he threw himself against Sera's makeshift barricade. "We should get moving!"

"I...I don't think that's an option anymore, Sully!" Sera shouted. Levering out of her cover, she thrust out one vambrace and spewed a screen of thick orange flames between them and the advancing Guavians, setting one of them ablaze and cutting off their advance. The flames caught on carpet, draperies, and faux plant life on the gambling floor, oily smoke boiling into the air, obscuring the security force's firing angle. "Morgan said we gotta capture the fatty!"

"*Capturewho?*" Sully questioned with a gruff growl as they caught a quick reprieve.

"Py'zah! The Hutt! We gotta capture him to do a voice password, or some katka, I don't..."

The Zabrak cut off, eyes widening. Moments later, the Togorian heard it. The sound of boots, pounding on a marble floor, echoed from the entrance into the gambling floor behind them, the corridor down which they had originally attacked. The door was partially obscured by smoke, but Sera could sense what was coming.

"SULLY, DOWN!" she cried, just before a series of crimson bolts streaked through the air. The Zabrak dove in front of her friend, raising one vambrace, but a stream of fire whipped through just before her holo-shield materialized. The shots would have struck her right in her upper heart if it hadn't been for Sully and the cybernetic arm that he'd wrapped around her. Instead of flesh, plasma clashed with metal and blasted the two of them apart.

The sound of Sera shouting his name was all he caught before the back of his head smacked the floor. The brightly decorated walls and ceiling blurred behind brilliant flashes. Auburn streaks fell in front of everything as it threatened to fade to black several times. What signs of color Sully could pick out began to multiply before it was all just haze. Muffled gunshots and clashing plasma gave his ears something to lock back onto reality. The adrenaline eventually pulled his eyelids back, and the feeling of heat across his left shoulder became apparent.

Sera was still fighting. Sully blinked, clearing the stars from his eyes, and tried to wipe the soot and blood-stained mane from his scar-creased face. His arm moved with unnatural ease, but when his hand should have made contact, there was nothing. The other hand shifted to where his prosthetic should have been, and found only the air. Sully twisted his neck and shoulders to see beneath his tangled hair, and felt his scars twist with a grimace. Sticking out from what was left of his sleeve was only a smoking twist of seared metal and frayed wiring. As his vision continued to come and go, he finally spotted the rest of his cybernetic arm, restless and sparking a few feet away.

Zig was gonna kill him.

The gambling floor was still chaos. The fire that had been set was still burning, crawling over lush, decorative banners, artwork, and expensive tapestries, catching on the piles of plastic cred notes left behind by fleeing patrons. Blasters were still blazing, firing everywhere in the smoky confusion. And Sera was still fighting.

He watched as she rolled underneath a stream of blasterfire, coming up into a crouch as she pressed a duo of Guavian Gangers readily backwards, refusing to give them enough room to bring up their blasters. One of them swung his rifle's butt for her head as she came up from the roll, a blow that she smoothly ducked, pressing close. One elbow thrust out with supernatural speed, cracking into the side of the merc's knee, shattering it horizontally with a sick wet *snap*. As he went down, his groan of pain subdued, there was a flash of crystalline blue as she stabbed her short gladius straight through the flexible armor at the man's throat, the point piercing out the back with a jet of blood.

As the soldier gargled his last, his fellow raised their rifle, bringing it to bare on the Zabrak, but before could pull the trigger she thrust one hand outward, a telekinetic grip seizing the dying Ganger and holding him in front of her to absorb the spray of blasterfire with the body. The armored corpse, stabbed and blasted to pieces, still served as an effective impromptu bludgeon as she slammed it into her second foe.

Another three emerged from the gloom, and she immediately charged them as well, throwing her dagger with a smooth underhanded cast. It pierced right into the first Guavian's groin, just as her lightsaber blazed to life. Every blow that she landed seemed to drive her forward, power her strikes, sharpen her reflexes. The Gangers didn't go down easily, though, and there was simply no way that she could fight on forever.

Not alone.

Sully clenched his one good fist.

Two more Guavians fell, one neatly bisected from shoulder to hip, the other cleanly cut down at the knees. But, there were more and more. Two emerged from behind a bank of pazaak machines behind her, blasters rising. She turned instantly, saber rising to defend herself—

—only for Sully's shield, thrown spinning through the air like an enormous, oversized frisbee, to smash directly into one of the merc's bowl-visored helm, shattering the plastic to pieces and sending him careening to the floor.

His partner turned just in time to see the Togorian sprinting for them with the only weapon that he could find on hand. His hammer was too heavy, too unwieldy, too slow for one hand. His blaster was fried from the blast that took his arm. But, the metallic bludgeon of his severed arm would do just fine. The Guavian had just enough time to scream in fear before

Sully brought the makeshift club down in a shattering blow, crushing the man's head in a shower of crimson plastic shards, fragments of bone, and spraying grey matter.

Sera paused, giving him a look. Both of them were panting heavily, coated in head to toe in ash, sweat, and a layer of warm, visceral spray. Only some of the blood was their own. By all rights, they both should have been exhausted, but when their gazes met, blue and brown eyes bright and warm, it was clear their second wind was just kicking in.

Sera finally breathed deep enough to speak. "Sully, that's...Kriff, are you okay?"

The Togorian worriedly looked down at his chest, his legs, his tail. His brow briefly lifted at the realization that the tail had a singed hole in its thick tufts of fur. A relieved exhale left him. "Ah...It's just fur. It'll grow back fine," he let out, more breath than speech.

His companion slapped her face. "YOUR ARM, Sully!"

"Huh? Oh!" Sully looked down to the nearly obliterated bicep still attached to his prosthetic shoulder, then to the metal arm in his good hand that should have been attached to it. "...Right." He slumped a bit, then flicked the destroyed cybernetic in a manner that made its hand wave dismissively. "It's...It's been through worse."

Sera shook her head. At least his stubborn ass was still standing.

As one, they looked towards the other side of the gambling floor, in the general direction of Py'zah's overturned dais.

"...One last chance...to rack some points," Sera got out as she caught her breath, giving her friend a savage grin.

"Sounds...sounds good to me," Sully responded, massive canines shining as his lips peeled back. Reaching to his belt, he cracked a bacta bomb between the two of them, soothing gel spraying over their exposed skin. They each gave a long, contented sigh, shoulders rolling.

"...Together?"

"Together."

"LOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOUD!"

"LOOOOOOOOOOOOOUUUD!"

With their joint battlecry peeling through the gambling hall, they charged as one. Flicking her hand behind her, Sera pulled her zabraki dagger back into her grip, her glowing saber held in her opposite hand. Sully charged with the one weapon he had remaining: the same, severed

arm. It was impossible to tell exactly what was waiting for them through the smoke, now so oily and thick that it was damned hard to *breathe*, much less see beyond a few feet. Thankfully, they had a way to cheat that issue too.

“Two on your left, three in the center, one on the right!” Sera shouted, gesturing with her saber towards the direction of each man that she had sensed. Sully nodded, breaking towards the left while she chucked a blade right and pivoted herself towards the center.

When the Togorian emerged from the smoke, he was practically right on top of his two targets. Before the first could even shoulder their blaster, Sully swept the rifle away with a casual blow from his severed arm, bringing it back around in a neat backhand to shatter the man’s jaw, sending him to the floor. As the next raised his blaster pistol, the furred medic tackled him, pushing the Guavian down with pure mass and momentum, wrestling across the shattered marble floor.

To his right, Sera absorbed a blaster-bolt with her vambrace’s holo-shield, wincing as the hard-light barrier shattered. Unperturbed, she stepped into the shooter’s guard and slammed her fist right into his faceplate, the repulsor in her vambrace shunting the Guavian’s head back with enough force to knock it clean off in a spray of blood.

She held onto the beheaded corpse like another impromptu shield, muscles flexing to hold the dead man up as she surveyed the three opponents closing on her flanks. One was staggering, her Zabradi dagger wedged into his thigh — an advantage that left her down a weapon.

With amplified might, Sera hurled her makeshift shield at the two men still in front of her. It was easy enough to duck beneath the shot from her limping rightward opponent. His weapon began to fire wildly, desperately, as she danced toward him. A flash of her yellow blade finally sliced through the blaster. He’d hardly realized the weapon was broken before her foot delivered a crippling roundhouse kick to his crotch.

“Ten!” Sera called back as the man dropped out of commission.

Her senses prodded her for the briefest moment with a sign of danger, but the next blaster shot she heard didn’t hit anywhere nearby. She turned to see Sully atop his unconscious foe, the man’s blaster stolen to fire on the men beneath their beheaded fellow guardsman. Well, one of them. Sully pulled back the pistol and left the last conscious enemy in the room alive to crawl out from the two corpses over him.

“Wait!” he cried, one hand up as he continued pulling himself free. “It ain’t worth it, man!”

Sera huffed, retrieved her dagger from her last target’s leg, and approached. Her saber pointed toward him as Sully pulled himself to his feet.

With blaster and laser sword alike facing him, the Guavian stopped where he was and threw up his other hand. “U-uhh— Py’zah’s in his private suite, just two guys with him! For kriff’s sake, d-don’t kill me!”

The two Arconans glanced at each other, both breathing heavily. Sully carelessly threw back the pistol and bent down to grab the merc by the breastplate with his one massive hand. Sera stowed her weapons and stripped the man of his own, tossing them aside. Like a synergized pair, the two straightened him on his feet and patted him down for anything else of use. Sera pulled a communicator from him and smiled.

“Thanks, buddy,” she said. “Word of advice: Don’t work for slavers. It’s bad for your health.”

The merc only had time to open his mouth before Sully’s knuckles crunched into him between his legs. He sagged, and Sully lazily shoved him over before he passed out.

“...Ten?” Sully asked.

“I got a few while you were dazed,” Sera said with an innocent shrug. “...So, okay. How do we get Py’zah down to the vault? I don’t think both of us combined could drag that fat lard before we get jumped by more of these guys.”

As Sully caught his breath, his ears twitched and eyes wandered up. “Well... they just need him to talk to a thing, right?”

Sera’s brow quirked, but she quickly realized what Sully meant as he started forcibly hacking up something in his throat.

Morgan was only briefly interrupted by another blast of sparks overhead. The fact that parts of the machinery were still there to spark at all was almost surprising.

“...But yeah, if you *really* want to make a kickass impression that’ll spin her little hearts, just watch out for the next time you see her out with another girl — or guy, or whatever. All you gotta do is deck the schutta in front of her.”

Eilen blinked hard as plasma continued to erode at the opposite side of the duracrete workstation. “...Morgan, what the kriff are you talking about?”

His hands flopped open like she should have gotten it. “Efficiency! You assert yourself as the worthier partner by kickin’ the other fracker down to the dirt. And you’re throwin’ in a little violence to make it happen! Zabrats love that crap! She’ll be all the hell over ya.”

Eilen hit the back of her head against their cover as more sparks flew out above them. She couldn't believe the gun was still shooting. More than that, she couldn't believe Morgan was still talking.

As if her prayers were answered, the blissfully familiar sound of a lightsaber ignition cut through the gunfire, followed by laser-hot slashing. The turret's fire ceased as chunks of it clattered across the ground, leaving only the beeping alarm to echo around the room. Eilen's eyes and vertical ears slowly crept out next to Morgan's blaster. She gasped with glee at the sight.

"Sera! Sully!"

"Bout time yer asses showed up."

Sera whistled and playfully spun her lightsaber. "Nothing to it. Just a thousand and a half guys we had to take out."

Eilen's grin turned into more of a haunted grit of her teeth. Sera and Sully's 'thousand and a half guys' were painted all over them. "I...see..."

Morgan squinted. "The hell's Py'zah?"

Sera proudly gestured back toward Sully. "Got the next best thing."

"Yeah," Sully said gladly in a voice befitting a Hutt three times his weight.

Both of Team Shroud cringed at the unexpected voice. "Wait, your vocal emulator?" Eilen asked, concerned. "Y-you've still got the old voice somewhere, right?"

"Good on ya," Morgan figured, "but it don't suit ya."

Sully shrugged. "Yeeeah... We can fix it later."

Sera pointed over her shoulder. "Welp, we're not gonna be along long, so... should probably get that thing open. What's the password?"

Eilen nodded. "Right. I'll just need another minute..."

She brought her tools to the second terminal in the room, thankfully not blitzed to pieces, and got back to work. Morgan nudged her with his elbow in the meantime, to which she quickly shook her head. Even as Sera kept her eyes on their exit, her senses picked up the sudden tense shift.

"You guys okay?" Sera called over.

“Yeah!” Eilen shouted. “F-fine! Nothing.” She sighed as Morgan shook his head, disappointed. “I’ve, uh... got it! Sully, here.”

Sully broke from the door to join her and Morgan. Eilen gestured to the password on the screen and waited. Sully blinked.

“...Oh! Right.” He couldn’t read. “It’s... Huh. Is that even a word? Sorry — it’s ‘Force, Schwartz’.”

Sully’s brow quirked. “Force, Schwartz?” he repeated in Py’zah’s stolen voice, confused. Either way, lights across the terminal and the vault locks alike turned green, and the massive wall cracked open.

Mission accomplished — almost. Now, with their prize in hand, all that remained was making an escape...