

The Good Day

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“However, it seems likely we have the upper hand well and truly around their throat. The rest of our time here can be spent as you please, ladies and gentlemen, though I would ask that you give our new hosts meaningful looks when you get the chance, you know, just to keep them on their toes.”

The squad laughed and the chatter arose. It didn't take long; in a room as small as this the same noise could be achieved by a tenth of its current population just as easily.

Glecka Dell was stuck inside a palace. The wrong palace apparently. He decided that on any normal day this wouldn't be a bad thing, a palace is still a palace, intended palace or not. What he didn't realise, and what his scouts failed to discover, was that the palace with the ornate outside in the city didn't have an ornate inside. In fact, it was all but bare. It certainly didn't contain a planetary ruler who he was supposed to meet. Instead there was a large contingent of their armed forces waiting for them.

Palaces are where the real money is stored. They keep treasuries and priceless works of art, they have excellent maids, not that they were slavers. Banks are hard to deal with. Palaces are the way forward he was told as he was given his orders. All they wanted to do was gain some leverage so that they didn't need to go around killing innocent people, but apparently the governor wasn't very bright. Palace, palace, palace. Fat lot of good this one is, except for ambush by enemies.

“Proz,” he said, “take a note for me please: I'm going to kill Leigo when we get out of here!”

“Ah, you don't need to be that harsh, Sarge,” Proz replied, “maybe just take a few toes to really rile him. That'll be a morale boost for the rest of the men as well!”

“You know what, I think you're right. Let's get out of here first shall we?”

“That'll be fun.”

“This was supposed to go very differently. We go in there, talk to whoever's in charge about giving control of their planet to the Mandalorians in return for only taking what we need and not punishing them, and they decide to say no before we even ask. Now we're cosily holed up in a walk-in closet in the king's old bedroom,” Glecka scowled, “with nothing in it to make ourselves comfortable I'd like to add, waiting for the other team to turn the power on so the door will unlock.”

“That's life.” There was a loud clank from the door. “And that's the power back on. Ask and you shall receive, eh?”

“Something like that.” Glecka raised his voice, “Alright everyone, let's get out of here. Whoever's nearer the door can do the honours but try not to get shot.”

A human in Mandalorian armour opened the door a gingerly and when nothing happened outside he opened it a little wider. The loud crack of blaster bolts hitting and chipping pieces of marble wall announced the presence of hostiles. Slamming the door shut, the man pulled out a couple of thermal detonators and a smoke grenade and activated them. He swung the door open about a foot's width and lobbed the grenades down the hall at the enemies and waited a moment for them to explode before a group of three Mandalorians rushed out, using their blasters to finish the militia off.

The other six, including Sergeant Glecka Dell and Corporal 'Proz' emerged from the room aiming in all directions in case they were surprised again. Satisfied that they were no longer under

immediate threat, the corporal tried to call their captain for an update. One squad was already in the other palace and another was now on its way to speed up the search.

Glecka's squad had new orders: get down to the underground levels and see if there's anything worthwhile left. *Good*, thought the Nautolan sergeant, *I'd like to root out all of these damned stupid guards and I can do the boss a favour at the same time. Who turns the power out of their own palace when they're trying to defend it? They just locked themselves in with us!* "Let's move. If that's where they came from then there'll be more cowards hiding somewhere behind them."

The squad made their way along the corridor and around a couple of corners with no sign of life other than the birds cawing in flight outside of the windows. They hadn't come in this way so they didn't know where the staircase down was since the first one was destroyed by an explosive.

"Sarge, we don't know the layout of this place. We're up on the third floor. Without blasting holes in the floor to get down a few levels we'll spend too much time hunting for stairs down. What if we get inside one of these rooms, find a terminal and get some useful information?"

Glecka considered this for a moment. "Sounds good Proz. Pick a door and get to work then."

The Hapan did just that. A few doors away and a few minutes later one of the squad had found a building plan, though it was fairly basic. Their concerns were boosted when they saw that there indeed was only one staircase marked on the map. They all agreed that there was probably some hidden passages for servants to move around the palace without getting in the way of the residents and guests but it would take time to find them and more time to find the way downwards. *That means we can't get to them but they can't get to us either.*

There did appear to be a hollow column running vertically into the central lounge chamber on the level above down to what they guessed might be the kitchens.

An old dumbwaiter!

Several minutes later the troupe padded into a room underneath the leisure room and locate the hollow column. There was no hatch on this level so there was only one thing for it.

"Bevel, you've got some detpacks haven't you? Set a couple on that wall and punch a hole through, would you?" the sergeant ordered.

"It's marble and a metre thick. Will it do the job?" the Zabrak asked?

"I haven't tried before. Make it three and let's find out."

The blast shook the thick stone floor. After the dust had cleared the Mandalorians looked into lift shaft, carefully checking for traps, none of which were apparent. Once a rope was secured Proz volunteered to go down first. Two others of the squad, a Human and a Chiss, used a rope tied at the corporal's waist to lower him down – it was quieter than making the Hapan climb down with his own strength as they didn't know who else was around to hear him and start asking blunt questions about the recent explosion.

He got to the ground floor, and on that level there was a hatch to the chute which was shut. Proz made a sign for the other two to hold him where he was and that he'd sneak a peek at what was in the room beyond.

For a minute he hung there listening and heard nothing so he pulled out a Relby and used his spare hand to ease the hatch open slightly. He couldn't hear or see anything, and by using a small mirror he confirmed that no one was there. He reholstered and made a sign to lower him down more. There was one more hatch on the second level underground and Proz used the same method again to find the room was clear for him to climb into. He gave a silent thumbs-up to the patch of

light several storeys above him, at which point the Chiss tied the rope down and the squad made their descent

Eight of the twelve made it to the bottom and another two were in the chute when voices were heard through the ground level hatch. The Mandalorian nearest froze but the man above him hadn't noticed and bumped into him, clanking a plated boot against a helmet.

It was at that point that a city soldier went over to the hatch to rid himself of his paranoia and found inside a humanoid in full Mandalorian armour hanging from a rope. The guard's reflexes were beaten when the intruder drew his blaster and put three shots into the man's chest, knocking him backwards and killing him. A dozen guards opened fire on the hatch. While they weren't as highly trained in marksmanship as the Mandalorians were, sheer weight of numbers defeated the intruder, sending him crashing down to the bottom of the shaft.

A few moments of silence held long enough for the transfixed guards to watch three thermal detonators bounce towards them, hearing the dink dink dink of the metal balls on the stone floor, thrown from the intruder still in the chute above the hatch. Taking no chances, as the grenades exploded he let the rope slide through his hands past the hatch and down to the bottom, making sure not to step onto the dead man.

The last few fast roped down to the bottom while there was still smoke in the room to disguise them. The squad hauled Luca out of the shaft shut and secured the hatch after them.

"Damn," sighed Glecka, "He was one of the finest sons of Corellia I've had the pleasure of serving with. A good soldier. And a good soldier knows that death happens whether we like it or not, and he was avenged."

"I'll miss him," said Proz. He took another look at his surroundings. "Well we've found the kitchens. I had a poke around while you all were coming down, I can't see where anything could be hidden."

The sergeant trusted his friend's judgement. "Let's move out then. Anything strangely arranged on the map? That might be a good place to start."

The map was brought up on a datapad and one section seemed to have a large expanse of nothing behind it though it was still underneath the rest of the palace. With two Mandalorians carrying their fallen brother, the squad made their way out of the kitchens towards the target.

They rounded a corner into what the map had labelled as an old storage room. It was full of junk of little value that appeared not to have been touched, let alone cleaned, for decades. One item piqued their interest though. Eleven powerful rifles held by very accurate hands were levelled on a figure slumped under a keypad set into the wall at normal shoulder height. The elegant but dusty finery worn by the man showed that he was their quarry, the Governor of Nal Batta.

"I give up," he said, not looking up. "What makes you think you have the right to march into my palaces and take what you want?"

The Nautolan sergeant was a little taken aback by this. "What makes you think it's right to govern a planet of crooked citizens by swindling them?" he returned. "You live in a corrupt system with Hutts for neighbours, and I thought you Falleen were supposed to be smart? You make friends of our enemies and insult us."

The Falleen looked up. "A little hypocritical of you."

Glecka took off his helmet and took several steps toward the governor. "You could have surrendered, placed yourself under our control and carried on with your life. But no. You had to make the warriors of Mand'alor get shot at, *climb* down a shaft and watch one of their own get blasted to bits. I think you owe us for that."

“There’s no way of getting to this treasury, the emergency power shutdown put a lock onto the system, it won’t budge for ten days, and by that time the Hutt fleet will be here.”

“Don’t you worry about that. We have things that go boom. We can open it up. Oh, and thanks for telling us where the money is. It saved us time torturing you, though that wouldn’t have taken long, coward.”

The Falleen scowled and was restrained with stun cuffs. Glecka called in.

“Captain, this is Sergeant Dell. We have the big man and we have the location of the target. Not bad for a day’s work, eh? We’re a man down.”

“That’s unfortunate, but otherwise not bad at all. Try not to take it out on our new friend. What does his lordship have to say for himself?”

“The planet is ours and he’s not happy about it. We found him in the second underground level. Getting back up isn’t going to be easy. Any chance of a helping hand?”

“We’ll take care of the plaza outside the front door. Can you get up there?”

Proz nudged their captive with his boot. “If I hold my gun to your head do you think you can lead us upstairs through the servant’s corridors? No slimy, cowardly ruler like you wouldn’t know the lesser-known routes around his own palace, right?”

Begrudgingly the governor nodded.

Glecka replied, “Captain, yes we can get up there.”

“Good. See you up there. Captain Jerr out.”

Picking up the dead man and dragging the Falleen to his feet, the squad made its way along the hidden passages up to the ground floor, hearing the sounds of ships’ guns pound the paved ground around them outside. Just as they reached the entrance lobby they discovered a group of twenty or so city guards taking defensive cover from the main doorway which had what remained of the doors hanging wide open.

Using an old technique to thin their numbers, the governor was pushed out of the Mandalorians’ own cover to distract the soldiers. The two-thirds of the squad that had crept round to flank the guards opened fire, immediately reducing their enemy by half.

The ensuing fire fight caused one small blaster burn to Proz’s shoulder armour and a lot of dead guards. In the end there was one left who threw his weapon down and sat in the foetal position. With the Mandalorians laughing, he was ordered by the governor who’d somehow survived the battle to spread the word they all native soldiers must surrender. “Let them have their bargaining chip. The best they can get is a cease-fire, they won’t win by using just us.”

“Does that sound like a bet to you, Proz?”

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