

JORM NA'TREJ

EXCIDIUM, CSP



FINDERS, KEEPERS...?

A PRO BOWL STORY

I did not sign up for this, did I?

Ulnor Trassik, Caina native and Lieutenant Junior Grade in the Imperial Scholae Army, deputized to the Reclamation Service, seriously doubted his past self's rationale. Sure, he had overall profited from his employment, but moments like this just didn't seem worth it.

In particular the moments when he had to open the door of a fully climatized speeder emulating the freezing temperatures of his homeworld, and set foot into some sizzling hell.

This desert was particularly bad. Black sand of presumably volcanic origin soaked up the inaudible yet somehow *present* midday heat and sent it right back up through Trassik's bootheels, while the blazing sun melted the distant dunes into dancing fata morganas. At least where it wasn't too bright to look at in the first place. And his uniform... the longer it spent in the washer after this trip, the better.

Crunching steps came circling around the speeder and walked off. Trassik swore under his breath and pushed a pair of strong sunglasses onto his nose as he hurried after his temporary superior. The man carried himself, his smile and his backpack through the heat with an ease and comfort that befitted his bronze skin, although his yellow eyes did not fit with the usual physiognomy of desert dwellers. Now those eyes laid upon Trassik, crowned by a slightly raised eyebrow.

"Not one to sit still, are you," the man said. Trassik knew nothing about him except his rank, and what it implied. *Battlelord. One of Scholae's innermost circle.*

"Sir, I was ordered to guide and accompany you to the Vault of Erised. You have not yet countermanded that order. Considering that you seem to know the way from here on, do you wish me to stay behind?"

Nobody could ever claim Ulnor Trassik to be undiplomatic in his desperate attempts to get out of the sun. But to the Lieutenant's horror, the Battlelord just shrugged indifferently. Not explicitly dismissed, Trassik followed his superior into a small crevasse in the sand.

The crevasse quickly grew into a short yet deep dead-end canyon. Set in the far wall was a utilitarian gate of some kind of steel, solid as a Star Destroyer and gleaming in the few sunrays that reached the bottom. As the two men approached, the black sand floor stirred and spat out two figures, large and bulky under rags clotted with this devilish black sand. One of them raised a palm against Trassik and the Battlelord in the universal sign to halt. The Palatinaean elite actually stopped and considered the guardians with a pensive look upon his face.

"Riddle me this, Lieutenant. If you were about to find what you most desire, would you take it and basically purge all further sense from your future life... or would you melt any chance to ever achieve it and everything in its vicinity into unrecognizable slag?"

Trassik's eyebrows climbed almost to his hairline as the apparently random question hit him with its full weight, in tact with the Battlelord sliding his backpack off and swinging it by the shoulder strap. A quick throw carried it over the heads of the guards and crashed it into the vault door, where it miraculously attached itself.

Trassik's gaze fell upon an inscription emblazoned on the pack's polster, so far hidden by his superior's back. It read *FWECpack*.

He turned on his heel and ran after the madman, already far ahead.

I really didn't sign up for this!

