

[Link to Google Doc](#)

Khryso Mallus PIN #15507: [Snapshot](#)

Liandry Lhucci Cataa PIN #13923: [Snapshot](#)

“Boarding successful. Commencing radio silence.” Colonel Liandry Lhucci Cataa reached up and tapped her earpiece, silencing the comlink. With a glance towards her companion, Warrior Khryso Mallus, she confirmed that he followed suit. After shutting off his comlink, Khryso stashed the device in one of his cape’s interior pockets. The deep and distant thrum of the ship’s engines and the barely audible whirring of electronics in the two droids present quickly became the only audible sounds. The stark gray hallway of the ship was empty for now, but there was no guarantee it would stay that way. The team needed to find a terminal before they were discovered. Liandry turned and began briskly moving down the hallway, a quick and subtle wave of her hand encouraging the others to follow.

Hours before, the Dread Lord of Plagueis had received reports from the Inquisitorius requesting a team be sent to assassinate the Collective commander, one Ghafa Ordram. The Dread Lord’s focus was centered on the *Nesolat* for the time being, however, so she had delegated the task to Liandry, the recently appointed Hand of Dread. This was an important mission, the success of which could turn the tide of the entire battle. Only the best agents would do, and so Liandry had elected to go herself.

She wouldn’t be going in alone, however. Besides, of course, her companion, IG-5597, nicknamed Jesse, the Pantoran put her authority to use by recruiting one of the available Tyrants under her command. While she was not a Force User herself, the Colonel recognized their wide range of abilities that made them quite useful to have around. There were many high-ranking Force Users in the Clan who weren’t okay with being ordered around by a non-Force User, but Khryso Mallus was not one of them. Although she had never had the chance to meet the Sith in person, the reports on him indicated he was plenty amicable to persons regardless of their Force sensitivity or lack thereof.

After contacting Khryso and securing him as part of her infiltration team, Liandry had worked with the Inquisitorius to plan their infiltration of the target vessel, the *Oceajar*. The Inquisitorius had a vessel in place, an escape pod that could be launched at the enemy command ship and would allow them to get inside. Its small size and lack of major energy signatures would mask its presence long enough for the team of Plagueians to get on board.

Khryso arrived on the *Dominant* not long after the plans were set. He had decided to bring along his astromech droid, R3-M7 for additional support. With the infiltration team ready, the operation commenced. An Inquisitorius shuttle moved into position near the *Oceajar* and launched the escape pod. The plan went off close to perfect, landing the infiltration team on board the Collective command ship. From this point on, they were on their own.

It didn't take the group long to find a terminal embedded into the wall of the ship. They had been fortunate enough thus far to not run into any Collective forces, but Liandry wasn't going to take any chances. "R3-M7," she turned to the astromech droid, "plug in here and find us a map of the ship and the location of Ghafa Ordam." As M7 rolled over to the terminal, Liandry turned to Khryso. "Mallus, keep on the lookout for anyone coming near here."

Their location wasn't very protected, a hallway with a few doors leading out of it. The terminal's location likely had a purpose, so it was reasonable for there to be regular traffic in this area. They had to be ready for anything.

Khryso nodded in response to the Colonel's orders and reached inward, drawing on the Force energy that was flowing through him to expand his senses outwards. There were no life forces he could detect in close proximity, but the fully staffed cruiser was far from empty. They needed to be quick.

M7 began to blurt out a series of beeps and whistles, relaying non-critical information about the ship to the team. "M7, stay focused. Get the information the Hand of Dread requested," Khryso chided the droid in a hushed voice, trying not to sound too harsh. He didn't want M7 going off on a tangent in front of Liandry. The Sith had yet to have the opportunity to truly work side-by-side with a member of the Plagueis summit like this and he planned to take the opportunity for what it was worth. Developing connections with the authority figures of the Clan would provide valuable opportunities in the long run and could serve as a vital asset.

The droid fell silent for a few moments before beginning to relay information about the ship's power capacity and consumption. Khryso hesitated, not wanting to reprimand the droid again, but thankfully, the current train of conversation ended as M7 announced with a triumphant tweedle that it had located a map of the *Oceajar*. With a swivel of its dome, the droid projected a holographic diagram of the ship.

Liandry leaned forward and began to study the map, committing some important details to memory before requesting that M7 transfer it to her datapad. The droid obeyed quickly, transferring the data, as it began a long explanation of the statistics, information, and prediction models in use to determine potential locations of Ordam. Khryso bit back his urge to tell the droid to get to the point, thankful that the machine was at least on topic with its discussion.

Distracted by M7, Khryso took a few seconds to realize that there was a group of beings approaching a nearby door. "Hostiles approaching," Khryso whispered, interrupting M7, "three of them, through that door." The Sith gestured quickly to indicate which entryway was compromised.

With swift and precise motions, Liandry ordered the team into position. She and Khryso took opposite positions on either side of the door, the Pantoran drawing her Sith Sword while the Sith took his lightsaber in hand. Jesse stood facing the door with its back to the wall. M7 stayed

over by the terminal and out of the way, continuing to pull what information it could out of the system.

A few seconds of tense silence passed as they waited for the door to open. Liandry couldn't help but wonder if it would have been wiser to avoid the fight entirely, but at this point it was too late to change her mind. If things went south, they would just have to figure out a way to deal with it. The only reason she was even taking this chance was that they had the element of surprise. Hopefully, that would be enough.

The door opened and casual chatter filtered into the hallway. There was a moment of confusion and hesitation as the Collective engineers saw Jesse standing across from them. Before they had time to react, however, Jesse had adjusted its aim slightly and began firing. Khryso reached out with the Force, applying pressure to the door to ensure the engineers didn't have the chance to close it. The effort proved unnecessary as the engineers were neither armed or prepared for any type of combat. In short order, Jesse had put all of them down, only one of them having time enough to turn around and begin to flee before being dropped.

"Targets eliminated," Jesse reported, its sensors scanning the hallway that the engineers had just come from.

"Do you think they heard that?" Khryso asked, glancing at the bodies as he snapped his lightsaber back onto his belt.

"I wouldn't eliminate the possibility. We should get moving." Liandry sheathed her own sword before turning to Jesse. "From here on out, only open fire if you have my express permission. Understood?"

The droid seemed to hesitate as it processed the request. "Understood." It echoed flatly before turning to follow Liandry as she and Khryso made the short trip down the hallway to reunite with M7.

"M7, we're leaving." The droid turned its dome to regard Khryso as the Chiss addressed it. M7 began to verbally relay some of the information it had been collecting, but Khryso set a hand on the droid's head. "We can discuss the details later. Unplug and let's go."

M7 continued its constant stream of beeps and whistles as it slowly retracted its plug from the terminal. Khryso glanced over at Liandry, who was already moving to one of the hallway's other doors. "I feel the need to apologize for my droid's long-winded habits."

Liandry glanced back at the Sith, smirking slightly. "Droids can be a handful, sometimes. Just don't let it jeopardize the mission."

Khryso nodded. "Of course." He and M7 fell in behind Liandry as she opened up the door. It led to yet another dull grey hallway. The interior design on this ship left quite a lot to be desired. Khryso found himself already missing the light customizations he had made to the *Silent Scream* to make it homier. He couldn't imagine being happy with having to work hours on end in a place like this.

Liandry led the team quickly through a maze of hallways. She had mostly memorized the path to the bridge when looking at the map. If she had to hazard a guess, that was where Ordam should be in the midst of commanding a battle. If not, M7's calculations would have to be their back-up plan.

Khryso kept his senses open to the Force, constantly monitoring their surroundings. More than once, the group had to duck into cover to avoid being spotted. Liandry had made the decision to avoid more fighting for the time being, but it was only a matter of time before the bodies they had left behind were discovered and the alarm was raised. They just needed to get to Ordam before that.

Thankfully, due to the battle, much of the crew of the *Oceajar* were at their battle stations. This eased movement through certain parts of the ship. It wasn't the most direct route, and therefore not the fastest, but it was the safest. Every now and then, Liandry paused and pulled up the map of the ship on her datapad to double-check her memory and make sure they were going the right way. Her memory had yet to fail her, fortunately.

On one such break, as they were drawing close to the bridge, Liandry turned to Khryso. "Alright, Mallus. When we talk to Ordam, I have a plan. Just follow my lead and everything should-" She was interrupted as suddenly an alarm started to sound throughout the ship. The ship's intercom came on, broadcasting an "Intruder Alert" alarm. "Break time's over," Liandry said, turning to the door.

"Permission to terminate at will?" Jesse questioned with its blasters at the ready.

Liandry glanced at the droid. "Denied." With that, she brushed her fingers against the door's activation switch. The door swept aside, allowing the silent tension from the hallway to leak into the room. Khryso could feel the rising emotions occurring across the ship, the flurry of activity beginning to spread throughout it as the soldiers stationed onboard the vessel sought out their prey.

The group left their current hideout and continued on the route Liandry had planned out beforehand. It wasn't long, however, before Khryso began to feel the noose tightening around their collective neck.

"They're closing in," Khryso warned Liandry, his hand drifting close to his lightsaber hilt as he jogged along behind Jesse.

"I'm not surprised," Liandry batted back, "another minute and we'll be coming up on the bridge. I'd like to get there before they spot us."

Khryso's jaw clenched as he imagined getting pincered between the soldiers and officers on the *Oceajar's* bridge and a platoon of marines tracking their movements. He had been in tough spots like this before and it was never pleasant. All he could do was stay focused on what needed doing and trust in Liandry's orders. She had yet to show him a reason to doubt her, so until that time came, he would keep playing according to her book.

Truth be told, Khryso was more worried about M7. The droid was barely keeping up with the group and its penchant to spout off useless information could end up distracting the droid in a dire situation. The Sith didn't have any particular love for the droid, but it had information on Plagueis and the Brotherhood in its systems that could prove problematic if it fell into Collective hands.

"We're here," Liandry whispered, raising her hand to stop the group. Just ahead, the hallway branched off. While Khryso couldn't see with his eyes what was around the corner, thanks to his connection to the Force, he could sense a large number of life signs further down. Having spent some time on the bridge of a ship himself, he recognized the alertness and anxiety that accompanied naval officers in the midst of battle.

Liandry crept close to the corner of the wall, putting her back flush to the gray durasteel. "Mallus, is Ordam on the bridge?"

Khryso reached out with the Force, fully enveloping himself in its flow and allowing his senses to drift out over the nearby area. There were quite a few individuals there, but he couldn't be sure if any of them were the target. Further exploring the area, he realized that there were at least half a dozen guards stationed outside of the bridge doors.

It was then that Khryso sensed an intense focus centered on them. Their hunters had deciphered the infiltration team's route and were only about a minute behind them. If they stayed here for too long, they'd be quickly found.

Pulling himself back into the conscious world, Khryso frowned and turned to Liandry, reflexively removing his lightsaber hilt from his belt. "I can't identify Ordam positively. I do know, however, that there are six guards between us and the bridge and a tracking unit is closing in on our flank. We need to make our move now."

Liandry nodded in acknowledgment of Khryso's instruction. "Put the lightsaber away, I think we should try a non-violent solution. If all else fails you and Jesse can fight our way out," The Hand of Dread addressed her subordinate "I'm going to pretend to have infiltrated Plagueis in order to capture you. I'll try to get you close to Ordam so you can take her out. To sell Ordam on this

little ruse, I'm going to have to lie a lot, so nothing I say leaves the bridge. Are we clear?" Liandry briefed Khryso, looking him in the eyes, scanning to see how he would react to what must have seemed like an outrageous plan.

"As you wish, but we really must get going. M7 has caught up so we're ready when you are." The gentlemanly Sith reacted to the verbal and visual stimuli presented to him. Mallus kept his focus on where the Collective's forces would be approaching from, his lightsaber now firmly hidden from view but within retrievable range. M7 wheeled itself behind Khryso while Jesse stood alongside the two Plagueians. Liandry nudged her left elbow into Khryso's hip as she raised her hands above her head and slowly began to advance on the oncoming soldiers who, for the moment at least, were holding their fire. Khryso followed suit and their droid companions maintained a short distance from their owners.

The group of soldiers appeared to be not much smaller than six feet tall; they had pale skin, squared noses, thin lips, and hairless heads. They were well-armed and looked unnaturally similar to each other. Liandry gulped as the forces of the Technocratic Guild approached her and her party. She knew that this group of armed Technocrats was going to be her best shot of reaching the bridge in one piece - she just had to convince them to take her there. Taking a deep breath, the Hand of Dread prepared herself for what was going to be just the first conversation that could determine the fate of the mission.

"Good day, gentlemen. I have something your commander will find very valuable. I'm sorry for sneaking aboard, but you wouldn't answer my hails and I had to maintain my cover. I think Ordam would very much like to see this Sith of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood. I managed to capture and extract information from him that will help you in the ongoing battle. So, with that in mind, are you ready to escort us to her location?" Liandry greeted the soldiers with an aristocratic lilt to her voice that was not part of her usual speech. The Pantoran waited eagerly for a response.

"How do we know you're telling the truth; that this isn't some ploy so the filth can strike at the heart of our command structure?" A gruff voice came back from the soldier who must've been in charge of this particular motley crew of men. It was clear that he wasn't buying Liandry's initial pitch entirely, but there was definitely a hint of hopefulness there - something the Hand of Dread could exploit. Liandry stroked her chin while she thought up a way to convince the Collective that she was being genuine. Then came the idea. She hoped Khryso would trust her as he had so far. She dug her elbow into the Chiss' ribs causing him to yell out in surprised pain. A collective smile spread across the soldiers' faces at seeing the supposed Sith in pain.

"See, I told you boys that I'm not with that scum. Besides, don't you think if I could shoot lightning from my fingertips I'd have killed you by now? Alas, I am just like any other child of Pantora: incapable of defeating such mighty troops as yourselves. So instead, I must appeal to your higher reasoning capabilities and trust that you will comply with my request to hand over the filth to Ordam personally." Liandry didn't think there was much personality left in the soldiers, but she had learned the power of deference many years ago and it rarely failed her.

“Very well. Turn around and keep going forward. We’ll be keeping our eyes on you.” The soldier in charge seemed eager to see how this would play out; or as eager as a Technocratic soldier could be. The Plagueians and their droids complied with the order, facing the direction they had come from. Both Liandry and Khryso felt the blasters pointed at their heads as they slowly advanced towards the bridge. A high-pitched noise came from M7 in shock that it had been kicked by one of the soldiers. Liandry stifled a giggle, not wanting to set off the group’s escort. It didn’t take long for them to arrive at the door to the bridge.

The door opened and Khryso and Liandry stepped through the door, followed by the soldiers that had discovered them. The guards on the bridge turned to face the Plagueians but returned to their normal positions when they saw their comrades escorting the pair. The *Ocaejar*’s crew seemed unmoved by the new arrivals, too busy focusing on their tasks. All save for the rather tall Nautolan who averted her gaze from the ongoing battle to face Liandry and Khryso. This was Ghafa Ordam and she began moving towards the new arrivals on her bridge. Liandry bowed respectfully while Khryso did not. Ordam was puzzled by this but nevertheless continued to approach the two.

“So what do we have here? Two of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood’s finest? You are brave but foolish to come here. It is not safe for people like you here. Now, would you care to enlighten me as to why you both haven’t been shot already? My men aren’t incompetent so you must have something to offer.” The Nautolan’s tone was inquisitive in nature, though an eminent sense of hostility was evident. Ordam’s deep, bloody red, bulbous eyes remained fixed on the Plagueians as she waited to see what the captives would retort. She wouldn’t have to wait long as Liandry had something to say.

“Well, just one, I’m afraid. You see, I’m not actually with the Dark Jedi Brotherhood. I’m something of a freelancer. When I heard that they were at war with The Collective I came up with a plan. I’m a simple woman, I like making credits and what better way to do that than to capture one of the Dark Jedi Brotherhood’s rising stars and bring him before you? This isn’t just any old Chiss Sith, this is Khryso Mallus, commander of the *Silent Scream*. His ship is out there right now fighting your colleagues. So he’s bound to have some information you can make use of. In addition to that, I’m sure you have infinite creative things you could do with him once that intelligence has been extracted. So, it’s time we negotiate a price. I was thinking a few thousand credits seems appropriate.” Liandry seemed confident in her abilities despite the unnerving appearance of the target she was here to deal with. The Nautolan paced back and forth, the Pantoran’s eyes following her as she did so. The Collective’s finest stopped in her tracks and her suspicious gaze returned to the pair of Plagueians.

“You have courage, I’ll give you that, but you’re forgetting that I hold all the power here. So tell me, why exactly should I bother negotiating with you instead of having you killed or locked up with him? More importantly, how do I know you two aren’t working together to get rid of me? I’m sure they were willing to pay you for that, so why would you not try to collect on both?” It was

clear from the tone of her voice that Ghafa Ordam was not buying the ruse. Khryso wanted to speak up but knew that this was something Liandry had to do on her own for it to work. Meanwhile, Liandry's mind turned to working on a solution to the final two questions that Ordam had posed. She had an answer for one of them, but it was better if it didn't come from her mouth.

"That's fair. You have no reason to trust me. However, your gentlemen that kindly escorted me here with my captive saw that there is no love lost between me and the Sith. Take their word for it. In case you need something from me as well: my people suffered under the Empire, as I'm sure yours did too. Our women were taken to be the playthings of Imperial officers to secure their loyalty. Our men worked to death in the mines, pushed beyond their limits, and discarded like trash. Tell me, after learning about that as a young child, do you think I give a damn about the Sith and their Imperial allies?" There was an uncharacteristically high level of emotion in Liandry's voice, a stark departure from how she'd been speaking to Ordam previously.

"You raise valid points. However, I'd like to see what my men have to say. Captain, tell me what you witnessed of this woman's disdain for the Sith she claims to not care for." Ghafa reflected on the stories she had also been told as a girl about the Imperial occupation of Glee Anselm. What the Pantoran had spoken about struck a chord with the Nautolan. Yet she needed more evidence if she was to negotiate and not just take advantage of the significant leverage she had in the situation. She looked past the pair of Brotherhood operatives and at the men who had brought them to her bridge as she eagerly awaited the Captain's report.

"The Pantoran tells the truth, we saw her assault the Sith. We thought it might be a ruse, as you do, so we decided that your supreme wisdom would be useful in deciding how to deal with them. We saw the pain on the Sith's face - it was almost pleasant if we could feel such things. We think there is a degree of truth to what she is saying but that she may not be entirely honest. This one is a mystery to us." The Captain's gruff voice addressed the concerns that Ordam had raised to him. The soldiers all maintained a firm focus on their Plagueian captives.

"I see. Thank you for that Captain. You made the right decision," Ordam responded to the Captain before turning her attention to Liandry once more. "Not exactly the glowing endorsement I'm sure you were hoping for. Not to mention you still haven't proven you're to be trusted or convinced me that I should negotiate with you. My patience is wearing thin so you better make this very good or you won't get what you want." The Nautolan looked at the Chiss the Pantoran was attempting to sell her as she addressed the Pantoran. His neutral but firm expression as he observed the negotiations implied he wasn't particularly disheartened by the woman's lack of success in convincing the Collective's finest.

"Well, this one's clan presented me with the perfect opportunity to infiltrate them. I don't know how they learned of me, but I was offered a job and told to convince the head of their clan that I was good enough. Once I had the position, I set about ingratiating myself with key members of the clan to build up trust. Not long after that, I was sent to this majestic system to fight for

someone who had given me nothing. I'll admit the mission given to me was to take this one and kill or capture you. But that was never my goal. I sell this one to you, get out of here, I'm happy. Alternatively, I'm sure your group could use more people who are talented much like you are. I'm sure the people of Pantora would be much more inclined towards your message if one of their own was among your ranks. As for why you should negotiate with me: if I have to be involved with this war, I plan on being on the winning side. It's better for you that I'm either on your side or nobody's, so our interests align. Surely you see that." Liandry was confident in most of what she had told Ordram; the last part not so much.

"You are quite sure of yourself. However, we've been playing this game for far too long. I will not negotiate with someone whose loyalties are incredibly questionable. Captain, relieve these troublesome individuals from my bridge. Also, check the droids. They may have information that will prove useful in the battle." Almost as soon as Ordram had stopped speaking, both Khryso and Liandry felt something heavy hit them and they dropped to the floor. A wicked smile spread across the face of Ghafa Ordram as her captives lay on the floor of the bridge appearing lifeless.

Jesse raised its blasters, ready to fight back, but the Marines were ready. Its weapons were taken away and the droid was led off along with M7 to fall victim to whatever cruelties the Collective had in mind for them. Their Pantoran and Chiss owners respectively were still motionless on the ground, Ordram standing over them. After taking a moment to revel in her victory, the Nautolan turned back to commanding the battle. The guards who had watched the whole encounter unfold from the door to the bridge ran forward and lifted the two Plagueians up off the floor to be taken to the brig.

2 Hours Later

Liandry's eyes opened to find herself not on the bridge as she last remembered, but in a small enclosed room that looked suspiciously like a cell. She cursed in her head at her predicament before looking around to see if she could spot Khryso. Luckily for her, the Chiss had also been unceremoniously crammed into the same cell. The two had failed their first attempt to bring Ordram's life to an end. The Plagueians would have to be more ruthless if they encountered her again. But their first problem was getting out of the situation they had found themselves in.

"They took all our equipment minus our clothes, so if we're going to get out of here we're going to have to improvise. Luckily, I think we have the brains to do it. I don't know the specifics, but they seem to be using some kind of Force-dampening technology. It's not going to be as simple as just using my powers to get us out of here." The Chiss explained to his superior. He examined the room as he had countless times during his imprisonment. There was no obvious way out of the predicament but there had to be a way.

Liandry let out a deep sigh to express her displeasure. She had failed and the situation she and Mallus found themselves in was all her fault. She had underestimated Ordram and now they

were paying the price. The fact they weren't dead was of no consolation; being prisoners of the enemy ensured that once they were interrogated death was the likely next step. However, being kept alive meant that they would have a chance at escaping. The fact Khryso had used his powers on other parts of the ship suggested that once they were out of the cell, it was all about finding the right opportunity to strike.

"I know our first priority should be getting out of this cell and back to Plagueis, but we should still try to accomplish the mission. There's one more thing: M7 has information about Plagueis and the Brotherhood I'd rather not fall into Collective hands. I'm sure Jesse is capable, but we should try to recover them before we confront Ordram again." Khryso wasn't sure how Liandry would feel after receiving this information, which was why he had related it to the mission to ensure she saw the value in the detour. He glanced at her from across the cell, eagerly awaiting her response.

"You mean you didn't wipe M7's memory before bringing it along on the mission? That complicates things. In the future, please do take more care with what information your droid is carrying around. I'm at fault in part, so don't think I'm just blaming you. I picked you for this mission and didn't make sure you had taken that precaution. I also screwed up with Ordram, none of this would be happening had I done better." Liandry was angry with Khryso for sure, but most of her anger was reserved for when she spoke about herself. She knew that things went wrong on occasion, but she had royally messed up in an important situation.

"We all make mistakes," the Sith responded after a short, awkward silence. "I know that's not particularly reassuring but we can't go back and change things. All we can do is fix the situation as it is now. With time not being on our side, we'll have to do something drastic to prevent them from keeping us locked up in here until they're ready to torture us. In fact, I have an idea that's crazy enough it might just work. We're going to fight and because they would much prefer to have both of us, they will be forced to intervene. We can use that to get out of here and retrieve our gear, rescue the droids, and go after Ordram again." Khryso informed Liandry of his plan.

"Well, you're probably the better fighter, but being a Sith and the one they know will have valuable information, they'll prioritize the knowledge you have as opposed to anything they could learn from me. You trusted me earlier, so now it's my turn to trust you. We'll go with your plan." Liandry wasn't sure that the Chiss' plan would work, but her own plan had failed and she didn't have a better idea for the situation they were in. She pushed Khryso, who recoiled slightly before responding with a push of his own. "Not bad Mallus, I can tell you've been working out," Liandry teased the Chiss.

Khryso allowed a sly smirk to spread across his face as he approached his faux foe. He advanced on the woman, his hands at chest height, ready to deflect or parry incoming attacks. The Chiss' feet moved in a triangular pattern designed to throw off the smaller combatant to give him the advantage. It appeared to be working: Liandry retreated as he continued his approach, throwing short, measured strikes as he walked down the Hand of Dread. For her part,

Liandry was narrowly avoiding being hit and throwing strikes of her own, though these were more haphazard and untrained than the basic level of practice her opponent had received.

Liandry was growing nervous; Khryso was making this look a little too much like a real fight for her liking as she backpedaled away from the advancing Chiss. They couldn't keep this up forever and they both knew it. Something would have to be done to draw the attention of their jailors towards the cell.

The Pantoran threw a wide, sweeping punch with her left hand while her right hand moved to where she perceived Khryso would shift his head to avoid the more powerful strike. Her plan half worked, her left hand missing but directing her opponent's head towards her right fist. It was not without some difficulty as the missed punch caused the Hand of Dread to slip forward slightly, catching Khryso just under the chin as she struggled to maintain balance. She bundled into Mallus and Liandry's weight sent them both tumbling to the ground. The sound of boots rapidly hitting the durasteel floor alerted the two to the approaching presence of Collective personnel. Liandry found herself above Khryso's stomach and looked to be lining up more shots to sell the confrontation.

"Hey, you two stop it, Ordam's orders." A breathless Collective goon yelled to the pair from beyond the confines of the enclosure. The pair didn't seem to hear his request or were so foolish they weren't concerned with complying. After regaining his breath, the guard entered the cell and attempted to break up the scuffle by force. He lifted Liandry off of her victim with considerable struggle. The Pantoran kicked and screamed and had her captor not been wearing armor she probably would've bitten him, too. He cast her to one side as he attempted to check on the prisoner unlucky enough to have raised her ire.

That was when he fell to the ground with the combination of Khryso pulling him down and a swift kick to the rear from the angry woman. He found himself swiftly relieved of his blasters with the Chiss taking control of his rifle and the Pantoran taking his pistol. There was an attempt to reach for another weapon but a blaster bolt extinguished what little life he had left in an instant. Khryso rummaged through the dead man's belongings and found among other things, a keycard. Liandry briefly flashed a slight smile as the two departed their cell, locking the dead body inside on their way out.

"We can't hang around, they're probably already sending more troops to put us back in that cell," Liandry remarked to Khryso, who acknowledged his superior's remark with a simple nod of the head. Their first move was simple, as they had been detained at the end of a long corridor. The two jogged to a junction with multiple possible paths to follow. Neither of them had been conscious while they were being transported to the cell, so they didn't know for sure which direction to head in. The Pantoran followed her instincts and her clanmate followed her. They moved straight ahead.

"We're probably going to want to get our stuff back before we free the droids," Khryso mused aloud. The Sith quieted his mind and focused on his lightsaber. It was in a small storage room, along with the rest of his and Liandry's stuff - presumably the possessions of other prisoners, too. Honing in on the location, the more tenured Plagueian marched ahead of Liandry, who was confused but decided not to question the move. Survival was her priority and it seemed like the Chiss knew where he was going. The pair soon arrived at another junction. This time the Chiss was the one to definitively decide on their course.

Taking a left, the pair found a short hallway with doors to other rooms lining each side. In an almost trance-like state, Mallus followed the direction he felt his lightsaber was signaling to him from. Liandry was acting almost like a scout, keeping her head on a swivel to look for any Collective forces coming to collect the pair. Aside from a few scares where Liandry had to push Khryso into cover to avoid detection, the relatively short journey went off without a hitch.

Liandry slammed her fist into the door's activation switch and the door slid open, revealing what must have been the stuff of other prisoners the Collective had accrued over time. The Pantoran wasted no time rummaging through the belongings to try and find her own while Khryso calmly called his lightsaber to his hand. He had a feeling he would need to use it. Once Liandry had put all her tech where it was supposed to be, she picked up Jesse's blasters before she went and stood guard while her companion retrieved the rest of his equipment. When both Plagueians were satisfied, they headed back out into the hallway.

Jesse didn't like being captured. He was supposed to be the hunter, not the hunted. Yet here he was with Mallus' R3 unit. No doubt the droid had valuable information that was probably best off not in Collective hands. The room was dark and gloomy, as if the belly of some kind of beast, save for the lights around the droidsmith's work station. Jesse didn't want to be rescued, he wanted to be the rescuer; so, it had been assessing the situation since being dropped off by the Technocratic Guild's soldiers. The biggest threat was the ion weaponry the droidsmith no doubt had somewhere, though Jesse had yet to spot it. The IG unit scanned the room for any traces of weaponry but the closest thing it found was a shielded compartment located behind the droidsmith. Luckily, their captor had quite the backlog of droids to be working on before he could get to Jesse and M7, though he seemed to be working rather efficiently.

Liandry poked a blaster out of cover and blindly fired it. Collective forces had tracked her and Khryso down and were now in the way of the Plagueians, who were trying to track down their missing droids. Her ally took the opportunity to move towards their attackers, a trio of Shikari Huntresses. The Chiss darted out from his cover and into the next doorway. The Huntresses were doing a good job of keeping Liandry pinned but she was making sure Khryso would be set up to take them down and allow the pair to continue on their way. A projectile unlike anything she'd ever seen zoomed past Liandry, causing the Pantoran to pull her blaster arm into cover. Khryso, as capable as he was, found himself outnumbered.

Khryso fired his blaster speculatively through a cloud of smoke, hoping he would be able to land a shot on one or more of the Huntresses. *One of those Huntresses must've set off a smoke bomb*, Mallus thought to himself. Nevertheless, he would have to deal with the situation at hand without the aid of Liandry. Not the most combat savvy at the best of times, the limited visibility would've definitely made her attempted assistance more prone to backfire. Khryso holstered his blaster and pulled out his lightsaber, igniting the blade before trying an incredibly risky move. He hurled his lightsaber in the last known direction of the Huntresses. With the smoke still present, it was too difficult to direct the saber into hitting a Huntress or two, so the Plagueian had to pray. Khryso pulled the lightsaber back to his hand with a reaching gesture, the weapon's striking violet blade emerging from the smoke in an instant.

Liandry peeked her head slightly out of her hiding spot to see the smoke clearing and noticed that there seemed to be fewer enemies visible than she remembered. That was when she spotted the two corpses on the ground, Khryso had done well without her and seemed to be closing in on the final foe, who had apparently decided that trying to disarm Khryso was her best bet. With none of the attention being focused on her, the Pantoran began sneaking closer to the battle, periodically glancing at the confrontation. It seemed to be evenly matched thus far, the Chiss was perhaps marginally behind. Convinced her comrade could handle himself, the Hand of Dread ran past the scuffle in hopes of finding her way to the droids. The sudden burst of movement must've distracted the remaining Huntress because Khryso found the opening he needed to cut her down and catch up to his superior.

Jesse was growing tired of his situation - at least he believed that was how the organics described it. The IG unit was eager to not be toyed with by the Collective's droidsmith and also felt a sense of obligation to the mission to ensure that the R3 unit was not left behind. Jesse knew the risks but had to find some way out of the situation. There was no use in relying on the organics to come to rescue him; they had their prime directive and ensuring his survival was not part of it. Deciding that it knew what had to be done, Jesse approached the droidsmith, who seemed startled by the sudden movement from the towering droid. The droid charged with a determined fury and crashed into the only organic in the room. Jesse nudged M7 who set off out of the room in an attempt to find its owner.

Khryso and Liandry roamed the halls of the *Ocaejar*, eagerly trying to locate the room where their droids were being held. Suddenly, M7 appeared, coming from the junction just ahead of the Plagueians and heading straight for the pair. Khryso seemed relieved to have his droid back with them, while Liandry couldn't help but notice Jesse wasn't following. The Pantoran feigned a smile while she waited for her own droid to join them so that they could begin the hunt for Ordam in earnest. She allowed the reunion between owner and droid to play out without saying anything but Jesse was weighing heavily on her mind.

"M7, we're delighted that you've made your way back to us, but where's Jesse? If he was behind you he should have caught up by now." Liandry was answered by a series of noises she couldn't understand. The Hand of Dread was not particularly fond of droids that couldn't speak basic, she would have to rely on Khryso to serve as a translator.

"M7 says Jesse charged the enemy and initiated its self-destruct protocol, taking them out so M7 could escape. I'm sorry for your loss." Mallus translated the droid's report of the situation. "M7, where is Ordam now? We need to finish this mission before we can escape, there's no point heading back as failures." M7 beeped again and Khryso set off following the directions the droid had started to relay with Liandry and the remaining droid in tow.

Their pace was much quicker than the first trip through the corridors of the *Oceajar*. Their pathway was more direct and their focus much clearer. Avoiding what fights they could still sat high on their list of priorities, but the Plagueians' presence was already known and their mission in jeopardy. Ordam would be much harder to catch by surprise the second time around, especially once she became informed of their prison break. A second capture by the enemy at this point would likely end in something much harsher than mere imprisonment.

Ghafa Ordam stood with her arms crossed behind her back, carefully studying the glowing blue hologram that floated in the air before her. After capturing the Plagueian infiltrators, she had retreated to a warm room positioned not far aft of the bridge. Coordinating the direct maneuvers of the *Oceajar* was most easily done from the bridge, but here in her war room she could step back and get a much clearer view of the battle at large.

The conflict was massive in scale, much larger than most the Nautolan had fought in before. Its success was of the utmost importance. With this strike, they had a real chance to properly cripple the Brotherhood and throw it into disarray. If the Collective could scatter the Dark Council, dealing with the disparate and often incongruous Clans would become a much simpler affair.

Leaning closer to the hologram, Ordam's eyes narrowed in on the Ascendant Fleet engaged at the *Nesolat* platform. They were holding their own, with the support of some of the Brotherhood's other clans, but the information she extracted from her prisoners could hopefully aid in turning the tide.

Reaching forward casually with one hand, Ordam tapped a button on the panel connected to the hologram's display. "Lieutenant Nedrull, please begin your interrogation of the Sith prisoner." The word Sith was clearly accompanied by some venom.

"Yes, commander," a voice responded from the panel's speaker.

Sliding her finger over to the panel's adjacent button, Ordam quickly spoke again. "Engineer Orchinne, how much longer until you've extracted the droids' memories?" There was no response even after several moments, causing Ordam's brow to furrow. "Engineer, respond." The silent hum of the room's electronics was all that answered her.

Ordam glanced over at the portside door, once again folding her arms behind her back. Two of the Collective's new Hive Mind Marines were stationed on either side, staring blankly forward. "You two, go check on Engineer Orchinne. If something is amiss, contact me immediately."

The two Marines saluted, turning to the door. As one of them tapped the door's control panel to open it, Ordam glanced up at the other two Marines stationed in the room. They were positioned at the fore door that led back to the bridge. With a slight head motion, the Nautolan signaled for one of the Marines to take up the guard position at the portside door.

As the portside door opened, however, one of the Marines there was rattled by a hail of blasterfire. On instinct, Ordam quickly shifted position, flowing into cover behind the hologram's display table. The Marine's partner quickly identified the source of the blaster fire, a figure in the hallway that the Reaver could not see. As the two combatants exchanged blaster fire, Ordam looked to the other two Marines, signalling them to take the long way around and flank the hostile. With a quick nod to confirm their orders, the two Marines exited through the fore door and began marching through the corridors at a brisk pace.

Ordam didn't have to see the attacker to know who they were. Clearly the Sith must have escaped, although whether it was alone or not remained to be seen. She snatched her Glie-44 out of its holster and began to consider what should happen next if the Marines failed her.

Khryso had managed to duck behind one of the *Oceajar's* door jambs before getting nailed by the Marine's return fire. He had tried to shoot down both of the Marines when the door opened just as he and Liandry were nearing it, but his opponent had taken cover just as quickly as the Sith had, completely unfazed by his partner's death. Khryso's combat encounters with the new and improved Collective soldiers had been minimal, but the reports from those on the front-lines painted them accurately. Ruthless killing machines.

Thankfully, Liandry had managed to flatten herself against the corridor's far wall, staying completely clear of the Marine's line of sight. As long as Khryso's suppressive fire kept the Marine trapped inside the room, Liandry was in the clear. M7 was also out of harm's way for now, having lagged behind the pair of sentients far enough to give him the time to wheel out of the field of fire.

M7 made his way over to Liandry and began spewing out lines of Binary. Liandry glanced over at the droid and shook her head. The thing still insisted on talking to her even though she didn't understand it. "M7 is saying that Ordam should be in that room," Khryso interrupted the

machine, his voice elevated to ensure that it carried over the blasterfire, “though we don’t know how many guards she has with her.”

“M7, is there another way in?” Liandry asked, her eyes scanning the walls nearby in search of an answer.

M7 responded with another series of beeps and tweedles that went on far longer than necessary. Khryso quickly cut the droid off before it could complete its explanation. “Not ideal, but worth checking out. I’ll hold this Marine here, hopefully-” Khryso paused, ducking down to avoid a volley of well-aimed blaster bolts before quickly returning his own. “Hopefully, I can knock him down and we can come from both ends.”

Liandry considered the proposal. Without Jesse she was relying on Khryso to take on any skilled opponents they ran into. Splitting up even more with only M7 to support her didn’t sound like a good idea, especially if they ran into another group of Huntresses or worse, Hive Mind Marines. “I don’t think we should split up, Mallus,” she responded, “at least not when there’s still so many unknowns.” She gestured down the hallway behind them. “For all we know, there’s another ten Collective soldiers around that cor-”

Liandry cut herself off as she dove into cover behind Khryso, avoiding a spray of blaster fire. Just as she had turned to look at the very corner she spoke of, two Hive Mind Marines had appeared there. They didn’t hesitate in opening fire on the group’s flank, nearly taking out Liandry in the process. While the Pantoran had avoided the first spread, more would follow in a moment.

Khryso glanced back at the Marines as Liandry took cover on the opposite side of the door jamb. “Good point.” In one swift motion, he drew his lightsaber, deflecting away the blaster bolts of the two Marines who had flanked them. The diversion of his attention cost him, however, as the Marine he had been exchanging fire with managed to graze his shoulder, causing him to drop his blaster.

The Sith firmly pressed his lips together as he allowed himself to fall into the Force, deflecting the blaster bolts back at their attackers while energy slowly gathered at the wound in his arm.

M7, meanwhile, was trying to charge into cover itself, but took a few blaster bolts for its trouble. The droid hung on, but was beginning to spark and smoke a bit. Liandry, pressing backwards to make herself as small as possible, began trying to figure a way out of the situation. They were effectively cornered unless they could open the door that was at their back. The doorway was pretty crowded with all three of them stuffed into it, and the door’s operation panel was on the outside wall next to it. In order to reach the panel, she would have to expose herself, but with some luck, it might be doable.

As Liandry went through her options, however, one of the Marines flanking them suddenly dropped. The other quickly turned and began firing down an adjacent corridor, quickly adjusting his position into new cover. With that threat diverted, Khryso was able to turn his full attention onto the Marine still in cover behind the door. Khryso stepped out of cover and quickly advanced on the Marine, easily using his lightsaber to deflect the rain of blaster bolts.

Liandry quickly reached out and tapped the door's control panel, opening up the barrier and quickly sliding into the small, dark room, pulling M7 with her. The room appeared to be some kind of weapons storage room, with several of the weapon racks empty but several more still loaded with various blaster rifles and pistols. For a brief moment, she considered scooping up one of the blasters to try and assist Khryso, but she quickly quashed the idea. She'd be just as likely to hit the Sith as she would the Marine.

Glancing out of the doorway, the Pantoran saw that Khryso had nearly closed the gap between him and his opponent. In the other direction, her eyes found the Marine just in time for the firefight to fall silent as the Collective soldier was shot through the head. She cautiously continued watching, ready to shout a warning to Khryso should the new arrival prove hostile. Instead, however, she couldn't keep a slight smile from rising to her face as Jesse stepped around the corner.

"Threat eliminated," the droid reported. It was clearly worse for wear, scorched nearly completely black from blaster fire and several still steaming holes across its body. The IG unit's voice modulation must have been damaged, because the way the droid spoke made it sound as if it were tired. Nonetheless, Jesse strode a bit unsteadily down the hall, making its way towards Liandry; though, its blasters were trained on Khryso's current duel as the Chiss cut down the final Marine.

Khryso stepped into the room, not even registering Jesse's presence as he scanned for Ordram. His eyes could not find her, so he reached into the Force, allowing his battle-heightened emotions to push his senses outward and wash over the room. He sensed the enemy commander mere moments before he sensed the danger she posed. Quickly throwing himself backwards, Khryso narrowly avoided the explosives that Ordram had set up in the room. Skidding to a stop on his back, the Chiss gritted his teeth and rolled back up into a crouch, trying to catch his breath from the impact the outer edge of the explosion had hit him with.

Jesse immediately responded to the threat, marching over to the door with its blasters raised, visual sensors scanning the room. Khryso paused for a moment in confusion when he saw Jesse march forward then glanced over at Liandry, who had taken cover alongside the door. "Is that Jesse?" Khryso asked, concern creasing his brow.

Liandry nodded. "I think you need to get your droid looked at, Mallus. That or just get a new one."

Khryso sighed and shook his head. From now on M7 would be confined to *Solidago*. Apparently, it couldn't handle anything else. At the very least, it would save Khryso the embarrassment of making the mistakes he had made.

Rising to his feet, Khryso stretched out his senses into the room to try and ascertain Ordram's location. Meanwhile, Liandry called out to her droid. "Jesse, secure the room's other exits. Make sure she can't leave."

"Understood," Jesse quickly responded, its servos screeching as the IG unit's arms swiveled to adjust the blasters' aim. With several quick shots, the droid destroyed the fore door's control panel, leaving the only way in and out of this room the door that the Plagueians currently had control of.

The room was quickly filling up with thick, black smoke. The explosions Ordram had set off earlier had taken out several pieces of machinery that were now sparking, twisted hunks of metal. The smoke would have afforded the Nautolan an effective smokescreen, but Khryso had a fix on her location with the Force. "Jesse, your two o'clock, behind the table!" the Sith shouted out instructions to the droid as he marched up to join it.

Jesse shifted its aim once again, laying down a screen of blaster fire towards Ordram. The Nautolan dove to new cover as the table began to shred under the sustained barrage, releasing a quick sustained volley towards the droid. Khryso was quickly beside Jesse, however, catching most of the blaster bolts on his violet blade and batting them back at the commander.

The two continued to advance on Ordram, trying to corner her and keeping the firefight contained. Liandry, seeing an opportunity, made her way back to the room where M7 was hiding out. Slapping the droid on the dome, she gestured towards the war room. "Come on, M7. Let's see if you can make yourself useful." M7 whistled dejectedly but followed behind the Pantoran.

Liandry slipped into the war room, quickly finding some cover behind one of the now inoperable computer banks. With a quick gesture, she pointed out an access port to the astromech droid. "See if you can get into their system, grab any useful codes or intelligence."

M7 slowly rolled over to the port, inserting his interface arm into the port and connecting to the *Oceajar's* systems. Just as he did so, the lighting in the room suddenly changed. When before it had been brightly lit in white, suddenly red was flashing all around them. Over the intercom, a robotic voice reported, "Red Alert, Emergency Protocols Initiated."

Liandry cursed under her breath and poked her head over her cover. "Mallus, end this now!"

Khryso nodded in response, not wasting time with a verbal confirmation. Instead, he charged forward towards Ordram's current cover. The Force flowed into him, pumping through him. He

could feel his heart beating, his blood circulating, his muscles tensing. His body pushed itself to the limit, granting him the ability to easily and quickly flip over Ordam, his lightsaber remaining in constant motion as it deflected her changing arc of blaster bolts. She remained pinned down by Jesse's suppressive fire, giving Khryso the opportunity to plant his boots on the wall, leaving a slight black mark, before he launched himself towards Ordam.

She scrambled out, trying to put distance between them, but Khryso kept on her as best he could, grimacing through the pain as a few stray blaster bolts made it through his defenses. Thankfully none of the hits were in vital positions, but they slowed him down long enough to give Ordam some breathing space.

While Ordam had a moment to recover from Khryso's attack, however, she was left exposed, allowing Jesse to land several blaster shots on her. Ordam stumbled to the ground, gritting her teeth.

Khryso paused, needing a moment to recover. Jesse's blasters remained aimed at Ordam. "Permission to execute?"

Liandry jogged towards the door, putting her comm-link in her ear as she activated it. "No, grab her and let's go."

"I don't think so," Ordam said through gritted teeth, releasing a stream of blaster fire from her DC-17 and knocking Jesse onto its back. She turned her blaster towards Liandry, but Khryso didn't give her the chance to pull the trigger. His lightsaber quickly spiralled through the air, burying its violet blade into the Nautolan's heart.

"Dammit," Liandry said, "couldn't you have just cut off her hand or something?"

Khryso sighed, calling his lightsaber back to his hand. "Sorry, Hand of Dread, I didn't want to take any chances."

Liandry sighed. "Well, it's over now, mission accomplished. Our ride is on its way." The Pantoran reached up and tapped her comm-link, making it clear she'd made contact with the Inquisitorius. "We're about to be up to our eyes in Collective agents, so I suggest we get to our rendezvous point ASAP."

Khryso nodded, drawing on some of his remaining energy to begin patching up the small wounds he had received. Jesse slowly picked itself up, clearly running on its last leg, while M7 returned to the Sith's side.

The four made their way through the *Oceajar* as quickly as they could. They needed to get back to the pod that had allowed them entry onto the ship hours ago. Several times they ran

into Collective soldiers, forcing them to reroute as Khryso knocked away blaster bolts. M7 and Jesse were both having trouble keeping up, but eventually they made it back.

As Liandry started the pod's launch protocols, it began to come under fire from the Collective agents that had been pursuing them. Khryso closed his eyes and reached out, erecting a weak barrier to stave off as much damage as possible while they made their escape.

As they launched out of the *Oceajar*, the pod was grabbed by the Inquisitorius vessel's tractor beam. The ship pulled them out of the *Oceajar*'s turbolaser range as quickly as it could manage as Liandry turned to M7. "Tell me you got something good out of those computers."

M7 began to tweedle in response, but Liandry put a hand on his dome. "Just show me." With that order, the droid projected out a hologram of some of the information it had managed to acquire. Liandry looked through the data casually at first, but then her focus sharpened. "These are the battleplans Ordam was working on when we interrupted her. According to this...there's a second Collective attack force on its way."

Khryso turned to M7, his fatigue beginning to show itself on his face. "M7, well done. Please explain to me, though, why did you tell us Jesse self-destructed?"

As Liandry transmitted the data M7 had secured to the Inquisitorious, M7 began to whistle and beep its way through a very long and overly complicated explanation that lasted the entire trip back to the Ascendant Fleet.