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Strong — #13593 <https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/members/13593/snapshots/2746/4819>

Lucine: <https://www.darkjedibrotherhood.com/members/14877/snapshots/2495/4995>

Arx System

High Orbit

The Sentinel-class ship shuddered as they approached the Collective Dreadnaught, *Ocaejar*, as the capital ship's point defense tried to drive the landing craft off. It was one in a flight of four shuttles, surrounded by a swarm of X-Wings that were hard at work keeping the enemy fighter screens from interfering with the assault. If there was one thing the Arconan Expeditionary fleet had over their zealous enemy it was small craft and troops, something on full display as the raiding doctrine of Arcona came into full force.

The Sentinels parted company, each one escorted by a squadron of fighters and headed to different parts of the Dreadnaught's hull. One headed towards the bridge in an effort to destabilize the enemy fleet's command structure, another aft towards engineering to cause havoc on ship systems. Another headed midship to help keep ship security forces busy, and the final skimmed the surface of the ship, before latching on somewhere on the underside of the massive ship. A quick hiss of plasma cutters and a removed chunk of hull later, a platoon of the AEF's finest poured into the lower decks.

They were quickly followed by a towering figure in shining armor, a large hammer in tow and a critical eye on their surroundings. Seemingly satisfied, he lowered a hand down back into the lander's boarding tube and carefully lifted a red-haired woman through the breach.

"Madame Vasano, welcome aboard the *Ocaejar*," rumbled the Chiss, bowing to his Consul. He looked up and then at nearby signs and markings on the wall, furrowing his brow. **"It appears we are somewhere near the officer quarters and staterooms. How odd, I thought our mission parameters had been to land near the gunnery deck to either neutralize this Dreadnaught's weapon systems or turn them upon their allies. We seem to be half a dozen decks below that, it could take some time for us to reach our target."**

"How frustrating," Lucine said as she drew her datapad from the folds of her cloak and began to flip through the ship schematics. "Yes, those *were* our mission parameters, but it appears that something has gone amiss. When we get back, be a dear and remind me to have a long discussion with whomever it was that programmed the Sentinel, won't you? I do despise it when things do not go according to plan." Her tone of voice implied that such a conversation would not go well for the hapless technician.

As the AEF soldiers secured the area, the Shadow Lady paced and frowned over her datapad. Her hood and cowl were swept back, allowing her to occasionally toss her scarlet curls in growing annoyance.

“Well, at least it seems like things are going apace with the other teams,” she said at last. “At this rate, the bridge team will have completed their objective long before we will be able to fight our way to the gunnery deck, and will be able to manually cease weapons operations from there.”

She shook her head and closed her eyes, trying to will her irritation away. At last, she turned to Strong. “Well, we could at least *try* to make it to the gunnery deck. Or we could secure our beachhead here and see if there are any officers that we could potentially take prisoner.” Her smile turned mischievous, and her tone lascivious. “Perhaps even see what other entertainments the staterooms offer, hmm?”

The Chiss straightened abruptly, his shoulders squared as her words and tone sunk in. He looked up and down the corridor they’d boarded into and then back at the sign, his mind mulling over their options.

Before he could voice an opinion, their short-range comms crackled to life.

“General Garmis, we believe we’ve located the Captain’s quarters! Twenty meters aft from insertion point!”

“Ah, the Captain’s own chambers?” mused the Consul aloud, stepping up to her subordinate. “Perhaps we’ll find some...intelligence...within, hmm?”

Strong nodded furiously in agreement, **“Indeed, My Lady! I believe a, ahem, thorough investigation of the site is needed!”**

He lifted his comm to relay orders, **“Excellent work, Lieutenant! Secure your position and await us. If no hostiles are present then hold outside, the Shadow Lady wishes to look over the area personally.”**

An affirmation could be heard, though the Chiss paid only half attention to it, instead offering his arm up to the Human woman beside him.

“Shall we?”

Lucine offered Strong a sweet smile as she took his arm, and they went together to the Captain’s quarters. Two AEF soldiers stood at attention outside. The other members of the platoon were nowhere to be seen, no doubt still working on securing the area.

The doors opened with a hiss to reveal a large sitting area. The room was ostentatiously decorated, boasting large overstuffed chairs, furniture too big for the room, heavy fabrics and an overabundance of expensive metal. A thick carpet covered the floor, muffling their footsteps.

“Well... this is a style,” Lucine said as she scanned the room with a moue of distaste.

“I don’t know, I find it to be rather homey. The entire estate is decorated in this style! Our sense of design has been handed down the Garmis line for generations!” Strong proclaimed, with a gleaming smile.

“Lovely,” the redhead said dryly. “Well, business before pleasure, hmm? Let us see what we can find.”

The two set themselves to the task of searching the room, searching for any helpful intelligence they could find.

“Here, my lady, look what I found!” Strong called out, holding up a handful of flimsiplasts.

Lucine appeared in one of the doorways that led out of the sitting room. “Excellent. I found this,” she said as she held up a datapad. “The reports I have read about Ghafa Ordam indicate that she is arrogant. I wonder if she is so arrogant that she would store top secret intel on an unsecured datapad?”

“Perhaps,” Strong rumbled.

“Oh, and I also found this,” the redhead said. She moved away from the doorway and toward the Chiss, hips swaying in an alluring sashay. Over her shoulder, he had a clear view of a massive, four-poster bed that dominated the bedroom. “There might be something hidden in the mattress. I think we should search it thoroughly to make sure.”

Strong blushed a deep purple hue as she took him by the arms and gently pulled him toward the sleeping quarters. “My lady, are you certain? It seems rather scandalous...”

“I checked in before I came out here. The *Oceajar* is in chaos, and everything is going according to plan,” Lucine purred.

As if on cue, Strong’s comm-link hissed to life, allowing them both to hear the voice on the line. “General! We’ve encountered hostiles. Approximately either in number, including— “ The lieutenant’s voice was cut off, but not before they could hear blaster fire in the background.

Lucine sighed and dropped his arms. “I knew things were going too smoothly. Well then, darling, I suppose we should go provide support.” She lightly rested one hand on his chest and gave him a smoldering gaze before turning toward the door.

"Indeed," sighed Strong, his gaze lingering on the Consul's form as she turned and walked away.

Perhaps for the best, he mused, his nose wrinkling, *this room smells like an old fish market.*

He let out another sigh, shaking his head and following Lucine's lead. She had stopped next to the open door to the stateroom, pressed against the side while blaster fire and shouting filled the corridor outside. The Chiss unslung his shield and gave her a look conveying he was prepared. The redhead gave him a smile and a nod, following him out the door as he rushed into the hallway.

Several bolts splashed against the energy field of his riot shield as Strong took stock of the situation, the troopers behind him taking the opportunity that his sudden appearance gave them. The General growled, seeing several downed Arconan troops in the corridor, seeing Collective armsmen huddling for cover against the bulkheads. The Chiss glowered, his face like stone, holding his shield out with his left to his side, an armored forearm lifted to defend his face.

The Shadow Lady peeked past her bulky companion, narrowing her emerald gaze at the security forces daring to shoot her people. With a clear view through the General's shield, she lifted one delicate hand and made a sweeping motion before turning it to an outward-facing palm.

One of the Collective troopers shouted in terror as he found himself torn from his meager cover and held in place by unseen forces, before being filled with blaster bolts. His companions stared in horror.

"Jedi!" one screamed, followed by the distinct sound of a grenade being armed and thrown towards the Arconans.

"Tsk," was all Strong heard from the woman behind him, even as he turned to present his armored back, prepared to hunker over her. The blast could very well kill him if it was a thermal detonator, but at least he could protect her—

The sound of a surprised curse and a clatter was followed by a hollow explosion that echoed behind him, and he looked down to see a smirk on Lucine's fair face, her hand lifted with two pointed fingers. He glanced back over his shoulder to see the Collective forces in disarray, holding their heads in pain or on the deck with bleeding ears.

"Concussion grenade, I suspect my dear," she stated smugly, reaching up to touch his cheek. "Though I appreciate your protectiveness."

Her voice hardened as she turned towards the Arconan forces still up.

"No quarter, clear the area," she commanded.

With the help of Strong and Lucine, the Arconan forces were able to clear and secure the area with no additional losses on their side. As the rank and file AEF soldiers re-secured the area, Lucine, Strong and the command staff reconvened near the Captain's quarters once more.

"It is odd that we are meeting such resistance here," Strong commented. **"What possible strategic value could the Captain's quarters hold?"**

"Hard to say, darling," Lucine said as she tapped on the interface of her datapad. She held it flat on her palms, and a holographic schematic of the Ocaejar appeared over the device. The bridge, engineering, and a sizable section of the midship section were indicated in red. The gunnery deck was indicated in yellow. "It could be that they are responding to the hull breach that we created. But it seems to be a disparate response."

"Maybe one of the Collective leaders is nearby?" the platoon leader suggested.

"Possibly," Strong allowed.

"If that is the case then it is too good of an opportunity to pass up. We already know that Ghafa Ordram is on board somewhere," Lucine said. "We cannot miss this chance to remove her from play."

"Well then, we should proceed without delay," Strong said as he hefted his massive hammer over his shoulder.

"Agreed," Lucine said. "We shall proceed with all haste to the gunnery."

One of the soldiers did a final sweep of the hall, glancing over unmoving bodies before pointing towards an open hatch.

"Stairs are this way, Ma'am," he spoke quietly.

"Stairs?" she wrinkled her nose at the suggestion. "The gunnery deck is six above our current position, darling, why would we ever wish to take the stairs?"

"Security protocols during high alert likely won't allow us to take the lifts, Ma'am," replied the trooper, keeping a straight face.

"Perhaps we should not tempt fate, My Lady," rumbled her Chiss companion. **"As I recall those holding your office do not have the best of luck when it comes to the turbolift in the midst of battle."**

Lucine very nearly glared at him before nodding, “Very well, the stairs. I thought I said all haste, come come let us go!”

As journeys went it was uneventful, a few smattering of exchanged blaster fire on the narrow stairwells punctuating a rather boring walk upward. By the time they’d ascended the six decks their Consul was looking a touch red in the cheeks, but otherwise unphased physically. Strong, knowing her better, could just pick up the hints of annoyance; a tightness around the eyes, the way she tossed her curls, a subtle twitch of the fingers as if she were about to use the Force to throw someone into a wall. Upon reaching their destination she paused, taking a few deep breaths that her escorts affected not to notice, and smiled, her features free of stress.

“Right, darlings, I sense quite a bit of confusion on this deck and many, many people. Likely the gunnery crew, though I do feel a knot of stress and franticness...” she paused, her finger drifting right, eyes closed, before stopping. “About there. Officers most likely. We shall press for that location, hmm?”

“As you say, Madame Vasano, we live to serve,” spoke Strong, thumping a fist over his armored chest. The soldiers said nothing, simply glancing at one another and shaking their heads slightly as if daring one another to speak. **“With me! Arcona Invicta!”** bellowed the big man, slamming his power hammer into the door to the gun deck.

“Did...did he even try to—”

“Pretty sure the door was unlocked but that’s what he does.”

“Oh hell he just rushed right without even checking left! Everyone, get after him! First three check left, clear the field, we’ll back up the General!”

The Arconan soldiers rushed to follow the big man with the hammer, whose personal shield generator was already starting to spark on his hip.

“No dying now,” murmured Lucine, stepping casually after her troops, saber hilt in hand.

Strong burst onto the gunnery deck with a roar and rushed further into the room. He moved with a surprising quickness, given his size and the weight of his armor, hammer and shield. His speed and the element of surprise allowed him to reach the nearest group of Collective soldiers even as they were still raising their weapons to fire.

He impacted against the man nearest to him with his shield, sending the man flying. He then swept his hammer in a wide arc, felling two more. **“Rapscallions! Turn and fight! You face a son of Garmis!”**

If any of the Collective soldiers were impressed by Strong's declaration, they did not show it. Instead, those that remained standing took a few steps back, focusing their fire on him.

"This will be a glorious contest! Witness the fighting style that has been passed down the Garmis line for generations!" Strong bellowed. He closed the distance in a series of massive steps, swinging his hammer with each step. The shield generator, which had been sparking, was now giving off a thick smoke under the strain of maintaining the shield.

Meanwhile, the first three AEF soldiers swept to the left, weapons raised and ready. Fortunately, there was no immediate threat. The second group fired around Strong, aiming for the groups of Collective soldiers who had taken cover at control stations to the Chiss's left and right.

Lucine stood within the crumpled doorway as she took in the scene. The Collective soldiers had the benefit of cover, while Strong and the AEF soldiers had none. Worse still, there was nothing nearby that could provide it.

Instead, she did the next best thing. Reaching out a hand toward one of the groups of soldiers, she created the illusion in their minds that Strong, the AEF soldiers and herself were about two feet to the left of their actual positions.

The gunnery crew might have been trained on turbolasers and the complicated arithmetic or hitting a moving target in void of space, but their skill with sidearms was proving to disappoint the Son of Garmis.

"These guys shoot worse than Stormtroopers," he could overhear one of the Arconan troopers say.

They weren't the zealots that the Collective fielded to battle the Brotherhood normally, and it showed as morale broke and some fled from the onslaught of blasterfire and the General. His hammer connected with the chest of a gunner chief with a sickening crunch, sending them into a pile of crates where they lay limp. Crewmen began to scatter at this, scrambling away, some throwing weapons away in their mad dash to flee.

"I sense a strong will nearby," mused Lucine aloud, walking up to stand beside her Chiss. "She is surrounded by those trying not to lose their heads. I believe that may be our dear captain."

"Then our mission is nearly accomplished, My Lady," rumbled the big man, hefting his hammer over his shoulder. **"The task is still to...eliminate?"**

She looked at him, reaching up to gently pat his cheek. Lucine was well aware of the chivalrous nature.

“Do not worry yourself, darling. In the end, it will be up to them,” she said with a smile. He straightened up in his armor, his eyes seeming to briefly unfocus before falling in step beside her. Their troopers arrayed themselves before and behind them, blasters shouldered and ready for any surprises.

“...do not care what state the bridge is in, we can command every critical subsystem from here!” came a female voice ringing from down a nearby corridor, loud enough to be heard through a jammed security hatch. “Send remaining security to engineering! None of this matters if those blasted Sith lackeys destroy the reactor!”

“Captain! Intruders breached the gundeck!”

“And where are they *now* Lieutenant?”

“Unknown, Sir, we’re not receiving any more information from that sector. Should we redirect a security team here to help def—” the question was cut off by a resounding bang on the jammed security door, drawing eyes to a monitor showing the hall. Another blow rang out, the screen clearly showing a massive armored man slamming his repulsor-driven hammer into the door. “Uhh, Captain...I do not believe they can get past the door with that...is that trooper puttin—”

The breaching charge blasted a man-sized hole in the door, filling the backup command center with smoke and a loud ringing sound. The Arconan troopers spilled through, blasting what was left of resistance and corralling the rest of the officers with waved muzzles to one corner. Unsteadily the Captain rose to her feet, head tendrils in disarray as she glared at the soldiers, and then the red haired woman who stepped in with them.

A cat-like smile slid slowly across Lucine’s face as she took in Ghafa Ordram’s disheveled appearance. She strode into the room as if she already owned the place as if she was not painfully aware of the weight of the blaster-muzzles on her. Bravado could do wonders for morale, especially when the forces were so evenly divided. “It is over, darling. Surrender now and you and your soldiers will be shown a measure of mercy.

The tension in the room was palpable. The remaining Collective soldiers hunkered down in their cover, weapons readied as they awaited a response or orders from their leader. The AEF rank and file did the same.

For her part, Ghafa seemed unperturbed by the Sith’s smug superiority. She sneered as she straightened her back. “You’re awfully cocky for a walking corpse. You’ve got no cover, and I’ve got the numbers. Tell ya what. *You* surrender, and we’ll kill you quick. Make us work for it, and you’ll suffer.”

Lucine raised her eyebrows at Ordam's words. "Oooh, tempting," she said in a voice dripping with sarcasm. Her green eyes fell on the white-face of a young-looking Collective recruit, and she gave a peculiar twist of her hand as she raised her hand to her chin, as if thinking about it. She extended her mind toward him and felt his will crumble below hers. "*Stun her.*"

The man moved with almost no hesitation, thumbing the switch to set his blaster to stun and raising it toward Ordam. At the same time, the Nautolan pulled a thermal detonator from her belt and lobbed it at the smirking redhead.

The shot went off, but it wasn't in time to stop the Captain from tossing her explosive. The Shadow Lady's eyes widened as the orb flew through the air, lifting her hand in hopes of redirecting its flight with the Force before it was too late. She was jostled to the side as her Chiss guardian pushed past, his hammer spinning in his grip and rearing back for a swing.

"Strong!" she shouted in alarm. It was like time slowed, watching the thermal detonator soar through the air. If it hit something solid, it would detonate, if it got too close to something metal that its magnetic quality could latch on to, it would detonate. She closed her eyes, thinking of Strong's chrome armor and the head of the hammer he was swinging at the flying bomb.

General Garmis grit his teeth, all too aware of the destructive power of the device that he was about to try and deflect. His hammer arced up towards it, his muscles straining as he swung it backward, fighting the repulsor drive built into the backside of it. He was banking, hoping, that the field generated would be enough to send the detonator away from himself and his charges. If it had been a simple grenade he would have happily dived upon it to protect his Shadow Lady, but that detonator would simply atomize him and all those he was trying to defend.

The repulsor field caught the flight of the thermal detonator, for a bare moment it seemed to hover in the air, before the hammer's momentum flung it back towards the other side of the secondary command center. It imploded with a popping sound, disintegrating the back wall and several of the cowering officers, not even giving them time to scream. By the time Ordam's stunned body hit the deck, it was over.

"Mistress Vasano, are you unhurt?" the big man asked, turning and dropping to one knee, sweat covering his face. Fighting the push of his own weapon had obviously taken a toll, as had the sudden need for action. **"I apologize for my rough behavior,"** he added, lowering his head.

Lucine took a deep breath as she willed her heart to stop hammering in her chest. "I am fine, darling, thanks to you," she said, as her eyes drifted toward the back wall and the remains of the officers who had gotten caught in the blast radius.

She tore her eyes from the back wall and her mind from what could have been. As Strong helped her to her feet, the other members of the AEF worked diligently to secure the scene, subduing the remaining officers and binding Ordam's wrists into manacles.

"It would appear that our mission has been accomplished," Strong rumbled.

"Indeed it has. I suspect Ordam will be a source of invaluable information for us. All that remains is to destroy the Ocaejar," Lucine said. She gave him a mischievous look as she reached up to lightly caress his jaw. "Such a shame we did not have time to perform a more... thorough inspection of the Captain's quarters."

Strong cleared his throat, even as a deep purple blush spread across his cheeks. **"Well, since your schedule has suddenly become free..."**

Lucine beamed up at him, before turning to address the members of the AEF. "Well done, ladies and gentlemen! We have gotten what we came for. Let us take our prize and get out of here, shall we?"