

The wind whipped past the open side of the LAAT, causing the singular, curled lock of hair at the forefront of Stres'tron'garmis's head to flutter. A squad of armored soldiers was within the craft as it sped over the blue waters of Selen, headed towards the island of Tekpantli. The General watched as the water flashed below them, clear and sparkling in the mid-day sun, while keeping a tight grip on the length of the parachute cord in his offhand. His primary hand was keeping a firm hold on one of the many handles affixed to the inside of the ship, giving him good purchase as he glanced down at his companion.

The other end of the rope was hooked to the back of a combat harness, which had been very difficult to both fit and convince the wearer to put on. A few holo-vids of deep sea creatures devouring smaller beings had mollified the recipient, but only as Bub Bub, the Ewok, was sure he could defeat any ocean predators. He was a Mighty Hunter, after all. Once it had been explained that he would have to swim several kilometers back to shore or float alone for hours on end waiting for a rescue, he had finally relented and allowed the fitting.

Strong shook his head and smiled to himself, fully aware of how dangerous his small, fuzzy friend was, and turned to watch the other landing craft that was flying in formation with them. Across an expanse of open air, he could see one of them bobbing in the air currents, the side panel open as well. He needed no macrobinoculars to recognize the purple lekku flowing in the breeze and was ready to meet the Qel-Droma Quaestor on the island's shores soon. It had been some weeks since they had been able to see one another, their work keeping them apart.

His smile widened as he saw her turn and look his direction, her offhand raised in acknowledgment, even if they were too far apart to read facial expressions. He let go of the handle and waved back, before freezing as he watched one of the many LAATs in sight abruptly dive towards the water below, slamming into at unsafe speeds and scattering personnel and parts across the surface.

Bub Bub watched in morbid awe as an armored soldier skipped across the ocean at least three times before sinking into the water, before looking up at his Big Blue friend and tugged on his pant-leg.

"Bub! Bub nub!" he shouted, pointing at the decaying wreckage, trying to be heard over the howling wind.

Strong heard none of this, his body rigid as he watched the ship carrying Tali buck in the air before it headed toward the water as well.

"No!" he half-whispered to himself, nearly jumping out of the LAAT after it, only to find himself unable to move.

"BUB!" shouted the Ewok, one hand raised towards the Chiss, a look of concern and concentration in the little bear's eyes.

He was about to demand release from the Ewok's Force hold when the pair felt their own ship veer off course, tipping to the right so hard that several DDF troopers spilled out towards the ocean below. Bub screeched as he found himself dangling, held from a similar fate only by the harness he'd so scornfully allowed to be put on him.

The landing craft righted itself briefly, before the ever-present sound of its engines cut off, and it started heading for the ocean. Strong found himself able to move again, and jerked the parachute cord towards him, snatching up Bub from the air and bracing himself in the doorway.

“We must jump, little one! Closer to the water so that we may survive! Hold on!”

Bub just looked up at him with a mixture of fear and steely resolve, as well as a question in his eyes that simply asked, ‘and what the hell else am I gonna do anyway?’

The water rushed up towards them, and the pair dove out, Strong twisting his body to shield the Ewok.

A blow to his helmet snapped the knight from his reverie, losing the train of thought he'd been following and reminding him to raise his shield to defend himself.

Ser Strong of House Garmis blinked, at a loss for what had just happened, and trying to recall why the black armored figure before him was attacking. Their breastplate was the color of burnt wood, their eyes a red so deep it was nearly black. Strange tendrils sprouted from their back, waving and undulating in the air behind them, a clear sign of corruption. It swung a sword at him, trailing smoke and shadows behind it, which he fended off with his sword. The mace in his right hand came down heavily, crushing the skull of what was once a man with a sickening sound.

It had allies that were circling him in what was once a pristine and stately courtyard. A ruined fountain stood in the center, its waters blackened and blackened roots filling half of its bowl. Walls towered to his left and right, behind him an open portcullis, and ahead, beyond the shadowy guardians, was the entrance of a keep. Tattered remnants of a banner were crumpled near the door, purple with a silver spear upon it. It tugged at his memory, even as he fended off another attacker and laid the creature low.

“Foul fiends! You will desecrate this place no longer! House Garmis has come to defend Her honor and free her from your dastardly master!” he bellowed, slamming his shield into another guard to knock them to the ground before following up with a mace strike through their chest.

The words flowed out of him, and they made sense...but he wasn't sure why. He was fighting an enemy; that much was obvious. And this place was important to him. And they had some...one...

"My Lady," he whispered to himself, an image of a silver-crowned woman flashing through his mind as he dispatched the last of the fiends in the courtyard. "**MY LADY!**" he shouted now, charging through the front door of the keep.

More creatures awaited inside, more twisted than those that still walked under the clear skies outside. They died when hit, which was all he cared about. He pushed on, reaching a pair of stately doors that stood high. He kicked them in, his plate mail clanking loudly as he did so. This was...

"The throne room," he growled, seeing banners of sickly yellow hanging on the walls, clearly covering the purple banners akin to the one he'd seen outside. A foul yellow with green tridents embroidered on them, and in the center of the room, the owner of them lounged on a throne meant for someone smaller than he. A Merfolk of considerable size, holding a trident that was the color of aged bronze, with a crown of coral and a scaled kilt. The man grinned as the knight stormed the room.

"The last Knight of Her Princess's guard, hmm? I thought I'd killed all of you already. Ah well, what's one more fool," sighed the man as he slowly rose from the throne.

"**Fiend! Where is the Princess!?**" roared Ser Garmis, hefting his mace threateningly. The man before him...Eulauti, the name came to him, glanced to his left, a flicker of a grin on his smug face. Strong followed his gaze and stared in dismay. Against the side of the throne room, chains attached to her wrists, was a purple-skinned woman of great beauty, a silver tiara on her head. Tired golden eyes flicked toward the knight, a look of hope showing through for a moment.

"Ser Garmis? You live?" he could barely hear her say.

"She has been quite stubborn. Most of the others here turned to thralldom rather quickly, but she has put up a fight. Admirable. Maybe I'll keep her like this for a time; she is quite...lovely," spoke the Merman in a menacing manner.

"**She is far too powerful for the likes of you to turn,**" snarled Garmis, charging towards the man.

Eulauti laughed and met him with equal force.

Off to the side, Princess Sroka watched with equal parts excitement and worry. Ser Garmis had long been her stalwart champion, fighting for and alongside her. Her magicks hadn't been enough to stop the barbaric Merman from taking over the keep, but they had kept him at bay long enough for her ally to return to her side. Now as long as he wo—oh.

With a final roar, the man known as Eulauti found himself pinned to the wall opposite of the Princess with his own weapon driven through his chest. Black blood flowed from his wounds and from his lips as he coughed it up. Sneering, he prepared to throw a final curse at the man who'd beaten him physically but instead stared in shock as the knight simply turned away from him.

Ser Garmis rushed across the throne room, grasping the chains and ripping them from the wall with a mighty pull, catching the Princess as she fell and gently lowering her to the ground.

"My Lady! I cannot tell you the shame I have for not being there when you needed me most! I will ato—"

"Shh. You came when I neededt you," she said, reaching up to touch his cheek. She leaned up and pressed her lips to his forehead, "My champion," she murmured before kissing him properly.

His eyes widened in surprise as she kissed him. He loved her, of course, but it had always been that of a guardian and his charge. She backed off, and then kissed him again, though she blew air into his mouth as she did.

Strong sputtered, coughing up water and looking up at the descending face of Bub Bub the Ewok, white fur drenched, as the little warrior prepared to blow more air into the lungs of his friend.

He lifted a hand up and stopped the Ewok, putting his palm over their face.

"Thank you, Bub," he muttered, sitting up slowly.

"Bub! Yub Bub!" shouted the Ewok happily before collapsing backwards into the sand and going promptly to sleep.

Further down the beach he saw soldiers and personnel being organized by a tall figure, purple of skin with a silver headpiece around her lekku and smiled. Her head turned to look over, a hand rising gently at him. He nodded and held a tired hand up in response before falling back to catch his breath.

"What an odd dream," he muttered.