

Selen
Estle City
The Citadel
Training Annex

The sounds of meat slapping canvas rang through the mostly empty gym as punch after punch landed against the heavy bag. Sweat ran down the tattooed and blackened arms of the Zabradi, who was training, bereft of a shirt and only wearing simple wraps around his hands. There was little to see behind his single living eye, focused on his strikes' impact and form, working on technique and power.

Karran Val'teo grit his teeth as strike after strike sent vibrations up his limbs, his knuckles aching. It was too early to find someone to spar with, train properly, and get a real *fight* in. So he was consoling himself to pounding a bag instead of a body. Switching up his technique and dropping lower, planting his more familiar palm on the floor and launching his legs up to swing, kicking the bag with one heel and then the other before allowing momentum to carry him back up to his feet, hopping in place lightly despite his bulk.

“Well executed, Mister Val'teo! Very well done! Impressively graceful despite the extra pounds you seem to have put on!” came a booming, and despite the words said, a genuinely appreciative voice from behind the Sith.

The Zabradi spun around, lowering into his combat stance at the familiar voice. The mountain of a Chiss was known to him, an annoying man who matched even his altered stature, though he certainly appeared lighter in frame. It was a laughable comparison for anyone else to make; the two men were practically stacked with muscle compared to the average soldier who'd make use of the gym.

“Garmis,” he said, teeth clenching slightly in an attempt not to spit the name, “What do you want?”

Stres'tron'garmis smiled warmly, holding up a gym bag, dressed in simple attire of loose-fitting pants and a sleeveless shirt.

“The same as you, my friend! It is early, and I am only now arriving back from Port Ol'val. Normally I train before the sun does rise, but my travels delayed me slightly.”

Karran cocked his head slightly, staring at the Chiss. From what he knew, the General was mostly stationed on Selen or working with the Marshalls.

“Marshall business on Ol'val? Didn't hear about any missions.”

The Chiss noticeably darkened, his ears purpling.

'He's blushing. I don't think I've ever seen him blush.'

"My reasons were...personal in nature," rumbled Strong, his voice more muted than normal.

"I didn't think you could speak without yelling, Garmis," said Karran, eyebrow raised.

Strong cleared his throat, "Ahem. Yes. I have been told I may be speaking louder than necessary, it is something I am trying to work on."

The two men's conversation was interrupted as a pair of female AEF troopers passed, using the in-door track to run laps. After they were out of ear-shot, the men glanced back at one another, having both caught the other 'keeping an eye on the precedings'. Strong cleared his throat again and turned to look at the gym equipment.

"You were working the heavy bag, yes?" he questioned, "A fine replacement for an opponent, I suppose."

"Don't you have a gym on that fancy ship of yours? I remember you boasting about it during Voidbreaker parties as a selling point to the women there. Why didn't you just work out on the way back from Ol'val, sublight speeds you should have had plenty of time to get in some sets."

"I...do. And yes, boasting. Boastfulness," the Chiss grimaced, dropping his bag. He turned, his shoulders squaring up. "The heavy bag because you lacked an opponent to spar with, I take it?"

Karran noted the unsubtle redirection; even if he wasn't the most social creature around Arcona, it was obvious the General wanted to change the subject.

"Yeah well," the Zabrak motioned around, his left arm catching Strong's eye, "you see a lot of options in here at this hour?"

The two glanced over as the AEF troopers started a fresh lap.

"You could have asked them for assistance, I suppose," stated Garmis, looking away and up as if trying not to focus on the women.

"I've been asked not to break any of the rank and file," growled the Sith, cracking his knuckles and stepping towards the Chiss.

Strong focused back on him as he moved, a tugging at the corner of his lips, "Then perhaps I can be of assistance."

There was no announcement, no bell, as the two men dropped into fighting stances. The Zabrak began circling, his body loose in its motion, while the Chiss bent at the knees and slowly turned to face him. Karran stamped a foot towards him, trying to bait him into attacking, and was almost

surprised at the speed at which Strong responded. The Chiss bull-rushed, arms flung out wide with no regard for defense, not that it mattered with how quickly he was moving.

Quick thinking and training were all that kept Karran from going down, the Force flowing through him as he planted his feet into the mat, his body like a pillar as Strong tried to tackle him. Even so, the General's arms wrapped around his own and pinned them in place with unrelenting power, trying to pivot and throw him. He released the Sith in his effort to toss him, only to watch the Zabrak roll with it, springing off one palm to toss his lower body into the air, spinning much as it had against the heavy bag minutes before.

The first foot struck, slapping the side of the Strong's broad features; the second was caught and pushed away, changing Karran's center of balance. He managed to work with it, rolling with the change back up to his feet, arms raised in preparation.

“Very good, Mister Val'teo! Very good indeed! You improvise and react well.”

“I'm not here for your praise, Garmis,” he spat, lashing out with several strikes that the blue man stepped back or leaned away from to avoid.

“Perhaps not, perhaps not. But it is my duty as your superior, in rank at the very least, to instruct while sparring!”

Strong followed this comment up with a change of stance, something more structured than how he'd begun the sparring match, one foot back and arms raised as he fended off a pair of punches and leaned in with a jab of his own. He struck the Zabrak in the center of the chest, this time causing him to stumble.

“Less talking, I don't need coaching from the likes of you,” he growled, ducking the follow-up strike and planting both hands on the floor; he leveraged his legs straight upwards to kick Strong in the midsection, just below the ribs. This time he got to watch the Chiss take a step back and relished the grunt he heard. Hopping back to his feet, Karran had little time to celebrate before the General managed to grasp him, one hand going to his upper left arm, the other wrapping around the back of his neck. He growled anew, trying to drive his elbow into Strong's side, when he felt a leg hooking the back of his knee and knew what was about to happen. Knowing he'd take the brunt of their impact, he did his best to go limp as they fell.

They fell in a heap of flailing muscles and limbs, both jockeying for position on top, struggling to pin the other down with their bulk and strength.

“I get the impression, in fact, for quite some time now, that you do not care for me, Mister Val'teo,” grunted Strong as he tried to maneuver his opponent.

Karran tried to wrap an arm around his foe's head, but they'd both been exerting themselves. Covered in sweat, he could find no purchase on the shining dome that was Strong's cranium.

“Now? Do you want to discuss this now? Fine. You’re loud, boastful, and hit on every female that can breathe. Even the ones who aren’t into men.”

Strong let out a hiss as he felt his arm get twisted, “I see. Yes, some of my behavior lacked in humility. Though while I showed interest in women, I always relented if they informed me that my advances were unwanted!”

“Are you saying I don’t!?” the shock in Karran’s voice was reflected in the loosening of his grip, allowing the Chiss to pull his arm free and return it to trying to push the Zabrak down.

“Of course not! If I had heard such a thing while still in the office of Rollmaster or the like I would have come down upon you with righteous fury and wrath, young Karran,” he said, trying to maneuver his body, throwing a leg up to try and catch the Sith in an arm-bar. “One should not shy from speaking of their achievements, though one should attempt to be more humble than I was, yes.”

“Oh, so we’re in agreement, then, that you’re a loudmouth and a womanizer?”

“I seem to recall you having no trouble playing the field yourself, Captain.”

Karran grunted and twisted onto his front to deprive Strong of the hold he was trying to finalize, though this did allow the surprisingly agile General to mount him from behind. Only his training kept the Chiss from getting a full choke hold on him.

“Haven’t been a captain for a while,” he said, teeth clenched as he tried to force the arm wrapped around his throat off. “What changed? Huh?”

“I recall something about ramming your vessel into—”

“Not that! What changed with you? You never came across as a thinker, and you’re trying your hardest not to watch those girls as they ran, and I know *you* noticed them because *I* noticed them.”

Strong’s grip loosened as he processed the words, allowing Karran to break free as well, pivoting on the mat to try and bring the Chiss down.

“So,” he asked with an almost feral grin as he looked down at the General, trying to push his forearm into a choking pin, “what happened? One of the women finally went to the Summit and claimed harassment? Or did you finally grow up?”

Much to his surprise, Garmis went limp under him, allowing Karran to push his arm into the man’s throat. He relented, rolling off of him and taking a deep breath as he stared up at the ceiling.

"I strike a nerve?"

"I...am unsure if I should speak of what has happened. Suffice to say, my pursuits in your absence grew more amorous and more...lasting."

Karran turned his head to look at the Chiss, who was now blushing again, his face turning purple even as sweat dripped off his scalp.

"What, you knock someone up?"

Strong blinked at that, his mouth opening and closing several times.

"I do not believe so, no," he said slowly, choosing his words.

"That sounded like an unspoken 'yet' right there, didn't it?" came a voice from the side of the mat the two men lay on. Both sat up abruptly and turned to look, seeing a woman they were both very familiar with, green dread locks and a wide grin, watching them. She had snacks, and a drink.

"How long were you here for?" asked Karran, eyes narrowing at Diy.

"Long enough that if it weren't for Big Blue here's following your old boss around like a puppy I'd be asking him to escort me to the showers. You two were a lotta fun to watch," she gave Karran a wink. "Course it doesn't have to be him."

"My old...boss..." he slowly turned to see Strong getting up to collect his bag.

"Very good sparring, Mister Val'teo! Very invigorating! Nice to see you, dear Diyrian," he said with a nervous smile, bowing to the woman, who grinned at him and waved.

"You're kidding me," sighed the Sith, the pieces falling into place. "You couldn't workout on your ship coming back from Ol'val because you brought the Quaestor back and were too busy kriffing her in your quarters!?"

The Chiss stood straight, shoulders set, refusing to turn and look at the pair.

"It...would be improper for me to discuss any personal matters concerning Miss Tali, you understand? It would be very rude."

"Miss Tali. Not Miss Sroka, huh?"

The General appeared to flinch, his ears turning a darker shade of purple once more, before he sped off towards the exit of the gym. Karran debated following him when he felt hands fall on his shoulders from behind.

“So, about that shower?” purred the woman in his ear.