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Vindictae Immortalis, Excidium, Scholae Palatinae

Dark Path, Order of the Sith

CSP Expansion - Face of the Enemy

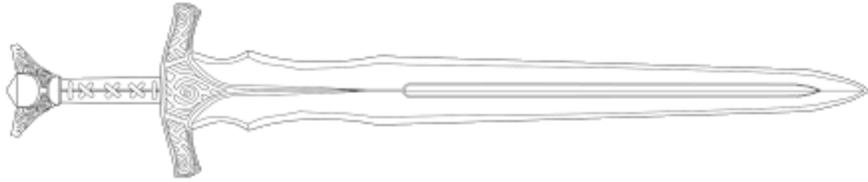
March 18, 2018



Before the Collective was even a thing, the Red Fury Brotherhood had struck out against Clan Naga Sadow and Scholae Palatinae. They operated from a secret base on a barren moon in a remote star system known to the Empire only by its numerical designation, but the Red Fury Brotherhood had called it Atlas.

Believing that the clans would never unite against them, the pirates felt they could raid the trade routes and antagonize the local sectors without any concerns. However, Imperial intelligence agents did find Atlas, and two of the major clans besieged it. Their fury had been as swift as it was brutal.

'Old Sarge' Jarvis had seen what they could do first hand and had woken from the aftermath with a splitting headache, his left hand cut away at the wrist. He still had nightmares of the encounter for years afterwards.



"Shit! Another one...!" someone had yelled as gunfire erupted, but the woman's lightning reflexes and martial arts training kicked in, making her very hard to hit. The blond girl jumped out of the way of incoming fire, and then turned on herself in a crouch, sweeping one of his men off their feet. She kept on rolling, her lightsaber arm extended outwards towards another, slicing his leg off mid-calf. With a flick of her wrist, the blade was thrust upward as the man stumbled and fell, his pain leaving him before his body hit the ground with a first and second thud.

The girl had followed through with the roll and was soon back on her feet. That's when their eyes locked.

Jarvis had cursed, realizing suddenly that she was one of the Force users on the battlefield and that he had mistaken her for one of his own men. He had turned his back on her, and in the heartbeats it had taken to look back at the sudden commotion, she'd slain three of his best.

With a meaty hand he'd drawn a vibrosword from its scabbard, keeping his blaster at the ready.

She seemed to consider him a moment, her head tilted, blond locks peeking from her cowl. Her brown eyes peered at him questioningly, suddenly interested in him for some reason. Was she smiling? He couldn't tell with the triangular breather mask covering the bottom part of her face, but his comrades hadn't intended to find out. They'd fled towards the compound - the cowards!

Grim determination crossed Jarvis' battle weathered face as he stepped forward to face her in battle, that's when he noticed a pang of regret cross her eyes. *'She's so young!'* he realized, but she had suddenly hardened her heart and her resolve, so he fired.

If it weren't for her lightning reflexes she'd have taken a blaster shot right in the chest. Instead, the shot burnt her left shoulder. Wincing in pain, she dodged two more shots and was upon him.

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"Peace is a lie, there is only passion. Through passion, I gain strength. Through strength, I gain power. Through power, I gain victory. Through victory, my chains are broken. The Force shall free me..!" he had heard her say, or something very much like it, and soon her red bladed lightsaber met his sword, and the blades sparked as they met.

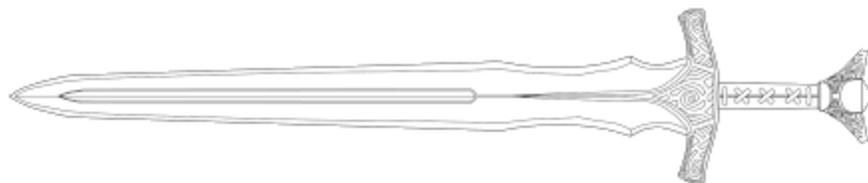
His blade held.

'That's right, sweetheart,' Jarvis had thought suddenly emboldened, *'that's cortisol! Hadn't expected tha--'* His thoughts were interrupted when her blade parried his next strike, bouncing against his blade towards his blaster hand. He screamed in pain as it was sundered clean from his arm.

"Looks like you need a hand," she had taunted as he caught his breath; her own breath coming out as a metallic rasp from the breather mask. To taunt him further, she placed her free hand behind her back. The intended insult was clear.

She waited to see how he would react to the insult as he nursed his wound and they circled each other. Hatred had filled him, but he fought and mastered it before attacking. She had decided to let him live because of it.

Their blades met once again, and she followed with a kick to his abdomen, then turned, and met his blade again with her own. This time however, she held it forcing him to force her own blade down towards her face. Then she extinguished that cursed lightsaber of hers as she sidestepped. With the resistance gone, his sword carried through and he was propelled by the strength he'd been applying to drive the blade towards her. As a result, he had nearly fell forward, but she hadn't given him a chance to get back up. Something hit him at the base of his skull and everything went to black.



When he'd woken some time later, his blaster was gone. The bitch had left his severed hand in his holster instead. Despite this desire to see the Force users destroyed, the encounter had changed something in him. He was now more wary, grisened and hopefully more wisened.

He looked at his blaster hand again. Her blade had cut through so neatly, that the doctors had actually been able to reattach it. The stitches they had left looked far worse than the scar from her blade. A shudder went through him at the thought of that *'kindness.'*

"I'd have one of those Collective cybernetic arms," he suddenly said out loud, but deep down he was glad he was made whole again.

"Something troubling you, Jarvis? You're looking at your hand again," asked a young Collective overlord standing next to him. His cybernetic eye watching him suddenly.

"Just old memories, from a time long past, sir," the older man replied to the younger. Life was strange. The older one got, the younger the overlords became.

"Anything that can help our allies against the Scholae invaders?"

"Perhaps." Jarvis' steel grey eyes looked at the night sky towards Caelestis city. "Last time I danced with them, I lost that blaster hand, and I've still no idea why I was spared. A lifetime ago; a different time."

"Well, if you've fought them once, you might have a good idea of the tactics we can expect."

"If you call being attacked at dawn and left for dead a fighting experience..."

"Well that's a start, they attacked at dawn..? How? Why?"

"Their main forces must have encircled our compound during the night. The strikes were precise, and disabled our air support minutes before the fleet flew in from the blaze of the morning sun. The men were too distracted with fighting off the ground forces, they never saw the main fleet fly out from the rising sun's direction. They used every dirty trick to scare and slaughter us, not caring if their forces got caught in the chaos. They dropped cages of Aakuls from the sky, divisions of Force users wielding red lightsabers came to slaughter us in the field. Others used the Force to topple to destroy our scanners and turrets.

"Myself, I was leading a squad to outflank them, but the Force user that caught us decimated my men before we knew what happened.

"They had walked casually into our group like they were part of ours, my mind was dulled somehow, like I knew something wasn't right, but it was too late when I figured it out.

"The girl -- she was so young -- fought like a demon. She had lead her men towards us, lightsabers concealed. They looked like another one of our groups, so we never blinked when they emerged from the smoke. Next thing I know, their lightsabers came to life, red light screaming towards the nearest men, cleaving some cleanly in two, decapitating others..." Jarvis shuddered at the recollection, the colour draining from his face at the recollection of his men's death cries several years later.

"I remember, I had pushed down whatever fear had nailed my feet to the ground where I stood, and I still don't remember drawing my vibroblade and blaster. My blade met her lightsaber, and our eyes met. We fought; I lost, and she spared my life." Jarvis' mouth was twisted in anger; he still couldn't understand why he had been spared when he had to live with all the dead men he'd lead out onto the field.

A robotic hand clasped him gently by the shoulder, perhaps trying to be reassuring or trying to show some compassion, but his hatred for the augments rattled him. Thankfully, the young overlord mistook the hatred in his eyes for a shared hatred for their enemy, "By the looks of things, we can expect a swift encounter with them soon. You might still get your answers."

"Who cares about a half-assed pay center on a remote island on Ragnath? Surely, the Scholae forces have better targets to exploit?" Jarvis' eyes looked at the young lordling, his brow knit in consternation.

"True, but it makes militaristic sense to take control of the lands with less defenses first. These islands will likely fall first, while the bulk of the Meraxis forces are lining up for a battle on the mainland."

Jarvis mulled that over, and turned his gaze towards the mainland. *'Is she out there? Out here?'* he wondered suddenly. "I'll tell the men to report anything out of the ordinary, just to make sure we're ready if they do." He looked up at the night sky, and something at the pit of his stomach

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told him that tomorrow would bring war to his small part of the archipelago. He considered the small compound's defences and started thinking of ways he could improve them. It dawned on him that he had lots to do, and so little time to see it done.