

## The Gang Gets a Burger

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by [AnInformant](#)

### Summary

A reassigned Security Chief evaluates her new mission space aboard a yacht.

The newest appointee to the 417th shifted her eyes sideways down the bar, where the glare of the man Venka had identified as *Maarek* had been boring into her like a DLT-18 laser rifle. He was sipping his whiskey carefully and idly responding to the adjacent albino's chatter with monosyllabic grunts of affirmation or scoffs of derision from time to time.

Sosh'acari had been traveling with the crew from this assignment for only a few days to arrive at the rendezvous on Lady Serathiss' yacht, during which she had deliberately avoided any socialization at all, except for Venka's odd but endearing attempts at starting conversations when they passed each other in the corridor. The concealments Sosh'acari employed to shroud the blatantly nonhuman characteristics of her species were a time-consuming but necessary modification given the usual nature of her missions, but this gathering felt like a reasonably tight-knit group. Friends, hard to say, but acquainted enough to not find it strange at all to share a meal together. She had been raised to eat alone and contemplate the silence, so the bustle of the bars were always a contrast.

She wondered briefly what the other soldier would have said...although, the departure of Melee to command the other ship had been welcome, having gotten a little context from Venka in the terse encounters Sosh'acari had allowed. *That* person looked at everyone like they were suspicious little bloodflies in his tea that he also wanted to eat.

In the presence of direct, frequent contact with the same people on a small ship, the cracks in the armor would become noticeable. As she had sifted water-slicked fingers through long black hair that morning to construct her usual thick braid, the true blue of her skin peeked through the parted follicles, and it'd be impossible to miss, even considering the careful hairstyle, if one looked closely. Then again, anyone who had ever gotten *that* close was a lover invited or about to get clocked in the face - sometimes both, if the other party was into that. The other obvious distractions of either interaction usually resulted in an intact cover.

The four of them looked a little out of place on the Imperial corvette of course, uniformless and

unfamiliar faces owing to that at least a little, so this Maarek character staring at her was diluted somewhat by the contingent of stuffy-looking officers assigned to Lady Serathiss' ship who were wide-eyed at *all* of them.

Her attention drifted to what was clearly the middle of their conversation, though Whitey was still doing most of the talking. "...and did you see him still hitting on Serathiss? You'd think he would give up after the last few times, I mean really."

Maarek seemed a little more intrigued by the topic. "I don't pretend to know what's going on in Dash's head, but does he really think he's good-looking enough for her?"

She raised an eyebrow and looked back at Venka, who colored quite prettily as she coughed into her elbow. No doubt her train of thought was the same; unfortunately, the good ambassador was, undeniably, plenty attractive enough. As if that's all there was to it.

"You have to admit, though," Maarek continued, tearing another uncouth bite from his burger, "he has a better shot with Hacarita."

She glowered, trying to decide how offended to be, and Whitey grinned. "Ten percent better than zero is still zero," he said with a wink towards her, earning him one of her most potent scowls.

Maarek faked surprise. "You can do *math*?"

"Fuck you, bombs don't build themselves jackass."

"Is this normal?" Sosh'acari addressed Venka, still irritated.

Venka looked a little dizzy. "It was worse when Melee was around." Her expression softened. "I hope he's doing alright."

"Pretty sweet moves back on Hok, Hacarita," Whitey said, changing the subject, and maybe the compliment was genuine even though the smile reached his eyes with more of a maniacal tinge than she would have liked. She was lucky that the informal delivery of her name sounded human enough to pass - it was too peppy, though. Not that she was above luring idiots into false senses of security with pep.

"How'd you get assigned to that shithole, anyway?" Maarek intoned suspiciously.

"Ha, maybe because of her name, 'Hok', 'Hacarita'. Hell, I just wanted to say it again."

"Oh my god, Whitey, shut *up*."

"Eat me, Maarek."

"You couldn't afford it."

"At least you admit you're a whore! Have you even *talked* to that Tholothian girl you *went on a walk with* during our last shore leave?" Whitey was gesturing air quotes wildly around his head.

Maarek spat something back at him and Sosh'acari set her mouth in a thin line, pleased to have avoided the question. Venka didn't read her relief in between generous swigs of beer, though, and pressed unnecessarily.

"So, how *did* you end up at that post?" Venka followed up innocently, but the acting really wasn't good enough and annoyance replaced amusement. Venka knew precisely what she'd done to land

such a spectacular demotion. Did she want dinner *and* a show?

Whitey and Maarek had chosen that precise moment to go absolutely silent, of course, so they were looking at her expectantly as well.

The truth was always more fun, anyway. “I killed some asshole at an embassy party. Nobody will miss him except for a few ISB bureaucrats.” Murderous credentials couldn’t hurt with this crew, desperately unsanctioned or not.

“Why?” Venka asked, wide-eyed.

It was a deeply inappropriate question, of course, but thank the Second Sight *that* piece of history hadn’t ended up in the file. Wolen didn’t even know, though he had pressed.

Sosh’acari turned back toward Maarek, dipping her tone into something a little too sinister. “I didn’t like the way he was looking at me.” She stared unblinkingly at him for a moment more, relishing in the sip of whiskey he had paused, before her attention was re-drawn by Whitey.

“Do you like the way *I’m* looking at you?” he dared, drumming his fingers on his pale cheek above where he was now leaning forward on his elbow, blocking her view of Maarek.

It was the way he might look at a superior weapons cache he was about to loot. Or at the blade of a knife about to slice through the pulsating jugular of his next victim.

Again, the truth was more fun. “Yes,” she said; Venka gasped and Whitey howled with laughter next to a now-very-concerned-looking pilot.

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Dried sweat clung to the back of her neck as Sosh’acari trudged up the ramp for a final time. Unloading the ship of its cargo had been an exhausting, but welcome, distraction from the strange social atmosphere she’d been forced to endure several hours earlier.

Well...maybe there was an edge of willingness in her participation, thanks to...he walked past her again, more slowly than before, chucking the crate rather skillfully into the pile before swaggering back up to her, the smirk already blooming on his face as he cocked his head to look up into her eyes.

Whitey was nearly as tall as her, which was impressive given how expertly she towered over most bipedal species, unusual even for Chiss women. It gave her an obvious edge in a fistfight or weaponized brawl. Even if she had been at a height disadvantage with this guy, though, she was reasonably certain she could still kick his ass, weapon or no. The thought sent a pleasant tingle through the nerves along her spine, and she failed to restrain an answering smile.

“Nightcap?” he suggested, swirling a half-empty bottle of whiskey in his hand.

“Looks like you have a head start,” she replied, swiping the container from him and pulling the cork out with her teeth, spitting it unceremoniously to the side. His eyes followed it as it bounced a few times on the floor before spinning to rest. He blinked and looked back at the bottle in her hand, then made eye contact again.

“We won’t be needing to re-close it, I guess.”

“The liquor on Hok was garbage. I plan on spoiling myself at every opportunity.” Sosh’acari punctuated the statement with a substantial swallow and then passed it back to him.

“You deserve to be spoiled.”

She laughed like he had earlier in the day, both shocked that he was a sap and that the sound was the first joyful noise she could remember making in months.

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Pleasantly buzzed, Sosh’acari stumbled gracefully back to her quarters. She had thought about carrying Whitey bridal-style back to his own, but he looked so peaceful drooling on the floor where he’d passed out she didn’t want to disturb him. Instead, she tucked her jacket carefully beneath his head and thanked whatever deity was listening for her Chiss metabolism.

Her mood was instantly ruined by the appearance of the ambassador, whose eyes were still bright despite the late hour. She scanned the room she’d entered; must have taken a wrong turn at some point, because this was definitely the bridge and not the living spaces. She had ended up on *his* turf after all.

“Good evening, Hacarita. I was hoping you would stop by tonight.”

Sure he was. Her lips wrapped around a caustic retort that never materialized.

“Please, have a seat. I was just updating the crew manifest.” He set a cup of water he had prepared in front of her and she eyed it warily. He interpreted her expression like he’d been born to read between the lines and swapped it out for a sealed container of sparkling, which she twisted open while pretending desperately not to be grateful.

“What can I do for you, Ambassador?” she asked politely. It may have been a minute since her etiquette coaching but she was level-headed enough to fake it long enough with Madell to appease him without arousing suspicion and get the fuck to bed.

He smiled, perfectly straight pearly-whites mocking her, and turned back to his console. “Venka’s scavenging revealed some interesting things in your file,” he said, and she rolled her eyes, knowing precisely where *that* was going. “It says here you have some medical training. Can you describe to what extent?”

Oh. Maybe she *didn’t* know where it was going, but hoped she didn’t let her shock at the diversion reach her face. “Battlefield patch-ups, mostly,” she replied casually, sipping the water and leaning back to cross her legs. A tickle at the skin of her throat made her want to itch at it - the camouflage of the skin-changer did start to become bothersome on her body after this long. Hence a component of her eagerness to turn in. “I have no desire to actually heal anyone, but it was so effective at stopping all the bitching that I became a go-to.”

He chuckled, and it was annoying how charming it was. “Never identify yourself as competent at something like that in the field, right? I fixed a printer once in Basic and I still haven’t shed a reputation as the ‘IT guy’.”

“Venka has a console acting up on the observation deck if you want to enchant her with your technical skills.”

“There’s nothing I could do with computers that would ever impress a prodigy like her.”

How the hell was this conversation so easy for him? Madell exhibited just the right amount of vulnerability to make her believe he was being authentic. Soch’acari felt like she was going to jump out of her skin, even moreso now that she felt her guard dissolving at the banter.

He sighed, typing a few more things before looking back up at her. “We’ll have to test your ability

against K3MD, though I'm reasonably certain the droid has the superior bedside manner."

"I could lie about giving a shit how you feel, but then we'd *all* be disingenuous."

"Have I given you any indication at all that I am not being truthful with you?"

"The 'Ambassador' in front of your name answers that question for me. I am thankful your antics extracted me from exile on Hok but I have no intention of joining the others in worshipping you."

"Can you write your name for me?" he asked sweetly and suddenly, holding out a tablet and a stylus he'd retrieved from beside him, and it was such a shift Sosh'acari couldn't conceal her surprise a second time. She took the pen without thinking.

"You know my name," she said flatly, wondering how deeply Venka's hack had drilled.

"Of course, Hacarita, but..." he looked nervous for the first time, "any more, uh...apostrophes I should include?"

Her eyes narrowed. "What else did Venka tell you?"

His confidence returned. "Nothing you weren't aware of," he said nonchalantly, "but *you* just told me quite a bit." He gestured to her hand that held the pen again and his voice quieted, almost to a whisper. He would have been easier to ignore if not for the way the light played off his high cheekbones, the sculpture of a god commanding an elite intelligence unit instead of actually being bowed to by reverent idiots on a planet that didn't know any better. "Why did you kill him?" he said, finally.

"I've already answered that question tonight. You'll have to interrogate one of the others." She stood suddenly and flung the stylus like a dart; it pierced the panel behind Madell's head and she heard a very satisfying intake of breath as the short of electricity crackled around it.

She bent and grabbed his collar, tugging him up with strength he clearly wasn't used to seeing from a woman. "What's wrong, Daro?" she said coldly. His first name felt wrong in the air but it was so gratifying she couldn't stop herself. "The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Is my history of killing smug diplomats concerning for you?" Physical intimidation was always the easiest way out of uncomfortable situations.

"Of course it is," he said calmly, and that vulnerable edge was still there, and *fuck* that was infuriating! She was starting to understand what Venka saw in him, lovesick idiot.

It was enough to deflate her rage though, and she shoved him back into his chair before scratching at her neck like she'd wanted to earlier. Whether or not he saw the blue skin beneath, he didn't comment. He *did* comment on her indiscretion, though.

"Do you ever think that maybe you were authorized for that mission because someone *wanted* you to cause trouble?"

It was an interesting theory, but Eye-Eye wouldn't have known any more about her motives than Madell did. "I can't say I considered it. I'm mildly ashamed to admit that it was an impulsive choice to kill him."

"Again, why would..."

She interrupted, "Nice try. Tell Wolen that this attempt was transparent and he owes me a beer."

Madell laughed, readjusting his collar. “It was worth it. You can tell him yourself, he’ll be with us for a moment longer.”

She shrugged, secretly pleased. Wolen had always been honest with her, presumably, which was more than she could say for her disclosures to him in return. She brushed off her pants and rearranged the petars attached to her hip. “I think we’re done here,” she said, polite pretense abandoned so that she could finally extricate herself from this inane conversation.

Madell looked down at what she’d written on the tablet before weaponizing the pen and resumed his typing for his open edit of the crew manifest. “{I hope you sleep well, Sosh’acarit’arung},” he said in perfect Cheunh, and it pissed her off so much she couldn’t look at him, deliberately silent, though the stomping of her feet was not as it echoed in the unpopulated hall.

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