**“The Walking Red”**

By Braecen Kaeth (4520)

*Nightmares of Our Own Making*

**The Citadel**

**Estle City**

**Dajorra System**

The alarm was abrasive. A high frequency wavelength that would arouse the dead. He knew that if he did not make it across the room, his world would cease to exist. Hellfire and damnation would burn down on him from above. *Atyiru will kill me if I oversleep again,* a groggy Braecen rationalized before dragging himself across the room. With a celebratory ***thump*** he slammed down the off button. Quiet. Tranquil, serene quiet. *If only it would last.*

Clad in his trousers and a shirt, he struggled to put on his boots. He leaned heavily against a wall to wrestle the last one into place. Mechanically, he opened the door to his room and plodded toward the mess hall. He was in desperate need of caf. Even if it was the crappy stuff they had recently begun serving in the budget cuts. *Why does a Clan need budget cuts? Especially on the caf?* Deep down he suspected it was due to the high volume of caf intake, but he felt more confident blaming the Shadow Lady and her Scion.

 He grabbed the thermos and began to pour the precious liquid into a cup, but it lacked the pizazz and rich bouquet he had become accustomed to. He took a quick pull from his cup and spit the contents out. *Cold,* he thought as he turned to yell at someone. He stopped cold in the middle of considering how to best teach a Journeyman to deliver him coffee. His eyes darted back and forth as he tried to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. His ears strained for any sound other than his own breathing. It was an uncommon sight for the mess hall to be both quiet and empty.

 A claxon of warning was ringing between his ears. Putting even the dreaded alarm clock of daily doom to shame. He drew the power of the Dark Side to his aide. It’s molten, cruel power crawling in his belly like a snake waiting to be unleashed. The power physically sickened the Elder, but he ground his teeth and managed the pain. *Only draw on the Force when you have need,* he reminded himself. The use of the power would take a toll on his body and leave him useless afterwards.

 He reached for his lightsaber only to realize he had left his weapon in his quarters. Forced to make a decision, he decided to advance towards an answer opposed to a retreat. He could always go back once he discovered what the threat was. As he approached the door, he heard a faint noise. The sound froze him in his tracks. Making himself small in the Force, he crept towards the portal to gain a vantage point. ***Click-clack. Click-click. Click-clack.*** The sound was unnatural. It unnerved the Elder to be at a disadvantage inside his own Clan headquarters. Pushing himself up against the wall that ran parallel to the hallway the unknown noise was coming from, he hid.

 The noise finally faded. Unsure if it was safe to proceed, he tiptoed into the hall. Each step was carefully planned from the ball of his foot to his heel – dampening the sound of his steps. The minutes crawled by slowly as he worked his way towards the safe room. Timeros had built the facility to ensure that should the Clan’s defenses fail, this room would give access to a series of caverns and eventual freedom for Arcona’s Summit. Braecen had only heard of the network of tunnels, he had never actually been in the depths of the planet’s surface.

 As he neared the room, though, he could tell something was amiss. There were signs of a struggle. Deep gashes and grooves in the ground and walls; obvious scoring from the blades of lightsabers. The lights overhead flickered and further down the hall he could see that the lights had altogether failed. A chill ran down his back. The hairs on his neck and arms rising with anticipation and fear. There was no longer need for morning caf, his body was producing enough adrenaline to stimulate an entire rancor from a dead slumber.

 The Dark Adept crept forward. His eyes scanning left to right along the hallway as he advanced. He felt the ominous presence of the noise from earlier. The Force signature was neither good nor evil. A raw hunger permeated it when Braecen rubbed against its mind in the Force. He was perplexed, but guarded as he turned into the safe room. He pushed outward in the Force, a desperate attempt to stagger his opponent’s footing until he could locate him. *Nothing.* He stood a little taller as if to discern the myriad of data his brain was processing.

 From above, a large spider dropped onto the Sith Adept. He thrashed back and forth, but was unable to get the larger, heavier opponent from atop him. Fangs sunk deep into his neck and the Elder slunk into a deep, deep blackness.