**“The Guardsman”**

By Braecen Kaeth (4520)

*Now’s the time to strike!*

**Antei System**

**Antei**

**39 ABY**

Braecen felt claustrophobic in the Grand Master’s Royal Guard armor. He had previously only worn the gear in times of celebration or ceremony within the Dark Brotherhood. Now, as the Grand Master’s guardsman, he was asked to wear it at all times he attended the Grand Master. The Adept could not get over how it collectively weighed and the way it limited his range in motion. He would much rather have his loose fitting Elder robes during his shift.

“Braecen,” Pravus demanded his attention, “we will *not* have a repeat of yesterday’s incident. Regardless of how you feel about something, you are meant to be seen and not heard.”

“It was a dumb idea,” the Guardsman pleaded. Goosebumps prickled up and down his arms as he attempted to talk himself out of trouble. To displease the Grand Master of the Iron Throne would result in death. “When I was a Consul-“

“Aha!” Sarin cut him short. “You are no longer a Consul, Braecen, nor are you afforded *any* rights beyond those which I give you as a recipient of a Letter of Reprimand.” He could sense the sharp emotion that rippled through the Force. Obviously, it pained the Elder that he could no longer serve the Brotherhood at large. Something that Pravus could use to his advantage.

“The Justicar is away,” the Grand Master started, “and I have received word that while he is absent a group of Undesirables will be attempting to leave Antei. You will handle the situation.”

“Everyone knows the Iron Throne has decreed these people as fugitives. Whom would be so brave to defy you, Pravus?”

“And old friend of yours, I believe.”

**Antei System**

**Lyspair**

**39 ABY**

He was perched above the entrance in the catwalks of the old hangar of the Shadow Academy. Attentive, he watched the comings and goings of individuals cloaked under the obscurity of the Force; his sphere of responsibility expanded to its maximum distance. Several hours passed before he felt a familiar presence rub against the edges of his perimeter. Someone he had not seen in many, many years since his forced exile from Plagueis.

*Lucien,* he thought. He could sense the diminished power of the once former Equite. Tales had been told that the former brother-in-arms had been driven mad by his position as Consul of Scholae Palatinae. The Grand Master had busted the man down in rank, severed his power to the Force, and left him alive to suffer a lifetime of regret and anguish for his foolishness. *So are the machinations of the Star Chamber’s Elite.*

Braecen dropped from above and landed in a crouch before his former friend. The man before him did not flinch or seem to be startled. He stood resolute before the Elder. Almost as if he had been expecting him.

“I sensed you almost a hundred yards away, Braecen. You should be more cautious.” The quiet tone of Lucien’s voice did not sound like a man whom had gone crazy.

“Impossible, I was cloaked. No one should have sensed me.” Bewilderment rang through the voice of the Elder. He was astonished that Lucien had sensed him, let alone from such a distance.

“Nothing is impossible. You’ve either a flaw in your technique or some bond between us strengthens my connection to you in the Force.”

A third possibility worked itself into Braecen’s mind. The other shared trait between the two was that they had been held accountable for their sins by the same man. Perhaps the Grand Master knew of a technique that allowed him to always be aware of the location of his antagonists.

“Are you transporting Undesirables off the planet, Lucien? I’ve been given a tip that someone is in violation of the proclamation and assisting these fugitives.”

Lucien stared at him for a long moment, “You know better than to ask questions you do not want the answer to.” He reached for his armory saber at his side. One press of the button activated the blade with a ***snap-hiss***. It cast a harsh light on the features of the man before the Elder. Resigned to earning the favor of the Grand Master, Braecen reached for his own twin hilts; his fingers wrapped around the obsidian and bronze cylinders before he simultaneously activated his own blades. Pillars of molten white erupted from the devices and threw the space around him into a violent glow.

The former Equite threw himself at Braecen. His two-handed grip gave him additional power with each swing and forced the dual-wielder to retreat under the onslaught. Braecen could not deflect such power with a single blade. Yet, he did not have to. A well trained practitioner of Jar-Kai, he used positioning and space to push Lucien’s strikes wide while he retreated.

*High, low, right, left.* The blows came with the ease and practice of a trained Dark Jedi, but they lacked the *umph* that a mid-level Equite or an Elder could put behind such blows with the Force. Braecen worked both blades in tandem as he batted away the weakening attacks. He could sense his opponent tiring. Now, with the advantage, he transitioned from the defensive to the offensive. He worked one blade over hand while swinging the other from the side. Lucien was forced to roll in retreat – allowing the Dark Adept to move to full speed on the offensive.

He crashed against the man’s defenses with savagery that only a two-bladed attack could deliver. Each decisive blow crashing against the other man’s own guard. The blades moving at the speed of lightning and each blow ringing throughout the stadium as thunder. Their motions were accelerated by the Force, but the Elder was aided by the Dark Side. His blows coming too fast, too powerful.

The dance suddenly halted with Braecen’s blade at Lucien’s throat.

“Do it,” pleaded Lucien. “Put me out of my misery.”

For a long moment, Braecen stared into the other man’s eyes. Then he bashed the stock of his hilt against the man’s forehead. Lucien crumbled like a sack of potatoes before him. The Guardsman bent over his opponent and searched his pockets until he found a datapad. It held very specific instructions to escort Undesirables from Lyspair to an outlying system.

Dutifully, Braecen marched towards the location of the fugitives. He would eliminate the threat the Grand Master spoke of, but he would not remove Lucien from the equation. It was obvious that someone else had designed this scheme and killing the broken shell of a man would not help the intrigue unfold. As he approached the safe house, he could feel the presence of several terrified young people within.

Once more, he reached for his weapons in service of the Iron Throne. “Damn you, Jac. I’m forced to clean up these messes while you are gone.”