**“A Good Soldier”**

By Braecen Kaeth (4520)

*Inquisitorious: A New Order’s Rending*

**Coronet City**

**Corellia**

The summons had come in the dead of the night. A beep followed by a flashing light until the Quaestor had read the message on his datapad. His Consul, Atyiru, had asked for him to lead the party that would secure assets from the Corellian System for their Jedi allies. It stressed the Elder, he wanted to be loyal to the Iron Throne, but he also had loyalties – and a heavy collar – within Arcona. The duality of the situation tore him apart, but it could not be helped. Not yet.

 He lifted a hand to block the sun from his eyes. It was a clear skied day on Corellia, the clouds absent and the sun shining in all of its glory. It would have been considered an agreeable day if he were not on a mission from the Shadow Lady and not a member of a secret Dark Jedi cult. As his eyes adjusted to the brightness, he lowered his arm, but not his gaze. He was part of the pre-arrival team to secure at CR90 Corvette from the Corellian Engineering Corporation. His departure team – the main body of his group – should have been here by now.

 Their absence gave him pause, but he was comforted by the knowledge that he was not alone. To his right stood Zakath Agrona and Tamashi Bloodfyre – the Battle Team Leader and Sergeant of Soulfire, respectively. He also knew a small team of Loyalists from the Dajorra Defense Force were stationed throughout the area to secure the perimeter.

 An annoyed sigh drew the attention of Zakath and Braecen to the young Equite, Tamashi, whom seem perturbed as he smacked his radio against the palm of his hand. “Problemzzz?” hissed the Barabel.

 Equal parts surprised and perplexed, Tamashi snapped his head up to see both his Quaestor and Battle Team Leader were awaiting his answer. “No,” he carefully began, “I just cannot get Team Two to respond and now Team Three has gone dark. And I cannot clean up the interference on the communication relay to make it wo-“

 Immediately, the Barabel dropped to all fours – his head inclined towards the sky as he drew large, long breaths through his nostrils. The Elder’s lightsabers had materialized within his hands, but remained unlit. His ice blue eyes darting left and right as he pushed his presence outward in The Force. A wave of the Dark Side rolled over Zakath and Tamashi as he expanded his sphere of responsibility to detect unknown presences. A noticeable absence of enemies and allies only raised his suspicion.

 “I zmell ‘em, Braezzzen,” the Barabel said indifferently as his tail began to whip back and forth with excitement. The Elder could tell when his Barabel subordinate was preparing to hunt. *Unlucky for them,* he thought a moment before Zakath thumbed his lightsaber to life. **Snap-hiss!** A brilliant crimson flame sprang to life and pointed backwards within Zakath’s reverse grip on the hilt. “At leazzz’t four. Perhapz a fifth.”

 Braecen spun around, his eyes looking for the smallest movement. “Damn,” he growled. He killed his momentum as he oriented himself towards the exit. “On my command, we move towards the corridor. I’ll hold the rear, but I need you both to work together to clear that avenue and then hold.” Both of them bobbed their heads in acknowledgement before they slowly marched, as a trio, towards the exit. The familiar crescendo of lightsabers igniting could be heard within close proximity and rose the hair on Braecen’s neck. *Crossing the Grand Master was a poor choice, Atyiru. I hope you know what you are doing,* he thought before the first opponent lunged at him.

 Both sabers igniting, he caught the single saber attack between his crossed blades. A snap-kick to the gut of his opponent forced him back, but did no real damage. Onward, his opponent came and was emboldened by the sight of an ally racing to join him. *Race to your deaths. I don’t give a damn.* Braecen turned to angle himself against both opponents. In the back of his mind, he could feel his allies encountering two enemies of their own. The Adept ground his teeth in frustration.

 The pursuing pair attempted to dart behind him and cut him off, but Braecen was too battletested, too experienced for such a maneuver. He somersaulted backwards and cut off the flanking enemy. A horizontal, double bladed slash forced his foe backwards and gave him the space he needed. Not wasting the visible backside of the Elder the Inquisitorious member darted forward with his blade raised. Braecen continued his attack by carrying his momentum into a tight, spinning leg sweep. His right foot connected with his opponent’s lead foot. As the darting foe began to fall, his partner leapt back into the fight to redirect Braecen’s attention.

 The Quaestor traded several quick strikes of his blades against his opponents. The sound of the crashing lightsabers echoing throughout the complex’s walls. The violence of the blows not softened by the permacrete’s harsh nature. Braecen fell into a comfortable rhythm as he exchanged blows with both opponents now. He worked his feet backwards in a calm and deliberate manner as he neared his goal: the corridor. He could sense that Zakath had scored a fatal blow on one of the attackers, but that of his allies were hard pressed by their remaining foe.

 As he neared the door, Braecen darted through and held his ground. The pair snarled in disgust, but remained silent. The Sith Adept slammed the button and the door closed in their faces with a simple hiss as the hydraulics kicked into action. Stowing both his blades, Braecen raced towards his allies. As he closed on the scene, he could see that the remaining foe was an accomplished duelist – his strikes wasting no motion or effort. His footwork was perfectly in order not a toe straying from the prescribed placement. This would be one of the Grand Master’s Grand Inquisitors.

 Unwilling to wait for more enemy forces, Braecen strode forward confidently and with purpose. His hands raised and a blue-white lightning pulsing between his hands. He unfurled a single bolt at the Grand Inquisitor. Easily, the opponent blocked the lightning by batting it aside with his blade.

 “Behind me,” the Quaestor barked to his lieutenants. He unleashed another salvo and another salvo of the brilliant, hot light onto his opponent as he continued forward. Under the repetitive blows of the Force Lightning, the enemy was forced to retreat to a safe distance – continually blocking and batting aside the power hurled in their direction. “Now!” Braecen yelled and the pair leapt from his cover and raced towards the transport they had been sent to acquire on behalf of their Jedi allies.

 The ship had already been prepped for flight, but he had retreated from the vessel in case it had been under watch or sabotaged. Now, with limited choices, Braecen would gamble that the vessel had not been rigged to blow. He silently prayed for it to be so. *Please just be a tracker.* As the sub-light drives kicked on, Braecen retreated up the boarding ramp. The Grand Inquisitor was now flanked by the pair that had been attempting to cut Braecen off from his subordinates.

 The Grand Inquisitor called out, “You will not get away with this, Braecen Kaeth! The Grand Master will know of your deceit.”

 Braecen never broke eye contact until the boarding ramp closed. The price for being a good soldier would be his life. He knew it deep down. No matter how desperately he tried to hold onto the Dark Path, it twisted from his grip. It could not, it would not, be tamed by him. “And that is why I fail.”

 “What was that?” Tamashi inquired. Braecen blinked in surprise, he had not heard the younger man approach. He had not been aware that he was in such close proximity.

 “I said,” he cleared his throat, “that is why we failed. The vessel is undoubtedly going to have trackers. It is unfit to send to our allies.”

 “I will inform the Shadow Lady that her operation failed, My Lord.” The student of Bloodfyre said matter-of-factly. He had begun to proceed out of the hold when a hand full of talons halted his advance.

 “Chooze your wordz better, Zzz’ergeant.” The Barabel turned a menacing eye onto his co-leader that belayed much meaning. “Zzee Z’hadow Lady never failz. Only we fail to deliver her vizzzion.” Tamashi nodded vigorously before the hand retracted and allowed him to pass.

 “What do you think happened out there today, Zakath?” Silence passed between the pair for several long moments. They both knew that Arcona had chosen a decidedly deadly position in defying the Iron Throne. Whatever storm was coming, it would hold the power to either thrust the Shadow Lady to the forefront of the Brotherhood or break Arcona at the Grand Master’s feet. Their missions would only become more perilous. And, now, exposed as traitors, they could not actively return to Arcona as heroes. It would only enrage the Grand Master and bring his wrath onto the Clan prematurely. They would now be in exile; publicly disavowed for the Iron Throne’s sake. Secretly, though, they could carry out the will of Atyiru without distraction.

 “We are going to need thingz,” the Barabel said as he read the thoughts of the Elder.

 Braecen snapped out of his thoughts and looked around at the surroundings for the first time. “I couldn’t agree more, old friend. And I think we are going to need a bigger boat.”