Brothers (And Sisters) in Arms

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#3530 Battlemaster Shimura Keibatsu

Kilometers outside of the Wookiee Colony

Sepros

Liarah brought her blaster pistol up to her lips and blew across the opening of the barrel in one quick burst. The lone cannok that had charged her just moments before lie dead nearly four meters away, smoke emanating from a crater between its eyes. Without moving her head she locked her eyes to the side, looking at Shimura through her peripheral vision.

“You’re insufferable sometimes, you know that?”

“You’re just upset I’m better than you at something, Master.”

“It was a lucky shot. It only took you four shots. Had you made it on the first, I might have been slightly impressed.”

Shimura felt a slight wave of defeat overcome him. He flashed a disapproving glance at his Apprentice, silently telling her to knock it off. Liariah picked her head up and stiffened her chest, oozing confidence. The Keibatsu felt the feeling of defeat ebb from him. Shimura was slightly impressed though, she was a quick study with a blaster pistol having just picked the weapon to train with the week prior. Shimura’s thoughts snapped back to the cannok, walking up to it, he crouched as he examined it. The cannok didn’t appear to be under any effects of disease or illness, but Shimura wasn’t an expert on infectious diseases.

“What’s wrong, Master?”

“Cannoks aren’t known for their aggressive behavior. Especially one by itself.”

Intrigued, Liarah opened the cannoks stalk-like eyeball with her thumb and index finger revealing a slight yellow hue at the edge of the iris.

“Hmm.” Shimura mumbled to himself, or so he had thought.

Judging by her Master’s response, Liariah’s inquisitive nature forced her to press for answers. “What’s wrong?”

“Dark Side corruption. It only affects creatures in close proximity to a site of substantial Dark Side power.”

“Sounds like what we’re looking for.”

Shimura didn’t say a word in response as he stood up. As he did so, his gaze moved from the cannok to the expanse of the forest in front of him, or at least what he could see between the giant worshyr like trees. Liariah grabbed the straps of her backpack and pulled down on them to reduce the weight off her back before the pair set off in the established direction of the Wookiee village. They hadn’t been walking for more than ten minutes before a trio of Wookiee scouts stepped out in front of them from behind one of the trees, undoubtedly investigating the sounds of blaster fire. The three Wookiees didn’t wear any clothing native to their species, save for the bandoliers slung over their shoulders, no doubt stocked with energy packs for the blaster rifles they had leveled at the Sith. The largest of the three barked something in Shyriiwook.

“I don’t understand your grunts, beast.” The smallest of the Wookiees roared in audible protest to Shimura’s xenophobia.

The Keibatsu kept his eyes locked on the biggest of the three still, unaffected by the futile attempt at intimidation. Instead the Sith crossed his arms in front of him, unimpressed. The midsize and smallest Wookiee looked at each other, their confidence of having the upper hand in the situation wavering. With all the attention on her Master, Liarah slipped a hand down to the blaster on her hip, feeling the comfort of its contour grip. Her eyes glanced back and forth between her Master and the Wookiees nervously.

“Master, I think I have a solution.” Liariah said as she removed her hand from the pistol and pulled the backpack from her shoulders. She rummaged through the pack until she found what she was looking for. Producing a datapad, she flicked it on and hurriedly tapped the screen a few times.

“It has a translation mod on it, Master.” Liarah said with a beaming look on her face, evidently happy about her foresight.

The leader howled again, the datapad came to life not even a second later. An unbearably mechanical, female voice chimed in. “You’re trespassing, Sith. Leave this place or be…” The datapad cut out and the screen went black, a sizzling noise coming from inside it, short circuiting from its exposure to Sepros’ humid climate.

Liarah tapped the screen a few times, attempting to revive it. “Back to square one.” She mumbled disconcertedly.

If her Master heard her, he didn’t acknowledge it. “Take. Me. To. Your. Chief.” The disrespect Shimura exuded was palpable.

The leader dropped his rifle to the side, taking a step forward, slightly in front of his comrades to produce the loudest guttural roar Liariah had ever heard, causing her to flinch in response. In the blink of an eye, Shimura raised his hand up, his fingers cupped as he twisted at the wrist, commanding the Wookiee squad leader’s head to spin around with a repulsive crunch.

Surprised yelps escaped the two Wookiees that still managed to find themselves alive while they looked on at their dead comrade fallen before them. Surprise quickly turned to anger as the sight of their leaders head lying in an unnatural position. The two roared at the Sith in Shyriiwook once more.

“If you don’t take me, you’ll be buried in more pieces than your friend here.”

As if by telepathic communication, the Wookiees slung their blasters over their shoulder in near unison. Each stepped forward to their leader, one altered the position of his head to a more natural position while the other threw their dead leader over his shoulders to carry home and take his killers to the Chief.

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Wookiee Colony

Sepros

They had walked for kilometers before reaching the Wookiee village, and even then, what the Sith saw wasn’t what they were expecting. Neither of them had knowledge on the species and were surprised to find that they didn’t dwell in the ground, but rather in the trees. Liariah looked up to see dozens of wooden outcropping nestled in the crest’s of the giant trees, wooden bridges connecting them to each other. The four came to the base of one of the giant tree’s and found a spiral ramp wrapping around the tree that ascended to the Wookiee village.

Once the group had reached top of the ramp the inhabitants of the colony suddenly stopped their actions upon sight of the pair of Sith following their escort, carrying their fallen brethren. Those unaware of the outsiders stayed about their business until they noticed the odd behavior of their neighbors, causing them to search for what they had been staring it. It was a chain effect reaction through the entire village. All eyes seemed to be on the Zabrak and Zeltron, causing mothers to hurry their children away and the bravest to lean for a better look against the ropes, designed to keep them from falling to their death.

Shimura didn’t bother to dignify the Wookiees with the acknowledgment of their presence as he passed them while Liarah was quite the opposite. She looked at each Wookiee and the exterior of their homes, intrigued by such a species. Not far from the centermost, largest treehouse, a female Wookiee ran up to the escorts, a tiny Wookiee trailing her. Low, pained howls escaped their lips. The two Wookiees from the forest gingerly laid their leader down, quickly cradled by the female. Another pained howl erupted. The dialogue wasn’t known to the Sith, but the message was clear. All four looked back them, unleashing a barrage of furious roars.

Liarah immediately dropped her hands to her weapons, one on the hilt of her lightsaber and the other to her blaster pistol, flicking the safety off in the same motion. Shimura bent at the knees preparing for combat as he opened his cloak, revealing his lightsaber. The Wookiees’ anger subsided just as quickly as it had started. The Keibatsu nodded, indicating for them to continue leading them to their Chief. The group pressed on, Shimura pulled his hand from the inside of his cloak, hiding his lightsaber once again as he stepped over the legs of the dead Wookiee. Liarah removed her hands from her weapons and followed in his wake, walking around the body instead of over it.

The group crossed the last wooden plank bridge before the Chief’s treehouse, which had seen much more use than the previous bridges they had crossed. Liariah stabilized herself on the rope hand rail while Shimura seemed to not be phased by the bobbing of the bridge, moving with the grace a gurrcat would be envious of.

Everyone stepped through the doorway of the Chieftain's treehouse, upon first glance the residence was rustic, much less accommodating than the Sith were accustomed to. The interior was brighter than they had expected, Liarah noticed that their use of technology was not quite as sophisticated as their own, but good enough to rig some kind of electrical lighting system.

Wookiee grunts filled the treehouse, the escorts, without a shred of a doubt, explaining who the Sith were and what they’d done. The Chieftain snapped his attention from the Sith escorts and fixed his gaze directly to the Sith, drawing his ryyk blade. Shimura noticed another Wookiee in their presence, standing behind the Chieftain, slightly to his right, a teenager, judging by the size of him. The Battlemaster smirked, making sure everyone saw his smug smile.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you.” Shimura said, raising a hand to yank the teenager forward through the Force. A startled cry came from the younger Wookiee as he tripped to the wooden floor between the Sith and his father. The teenager’s hands went to his throat as the life began to be choked out of him. Readying himself for combat to save his kin, the Chieftain looked on between his son and the Zabrak.

“I know you understand me, so I’ll say this once. We need a guide to the ruined temple nearby.” Shimura said, relentlessly clamping down on the chokehold that gripped his son.

“Listen,” Liarah chimed in, “we need a guide and you don’t want your son to die needlessly. Give us what we want and you’ll never see us again. Nobody else needs to die today.”

Metal clanged as the ryyk blade was dropped to the floor, the Chieftain let out a low defeated moan. His son gasped for air, freed from the Force induced suffocation. His eyeballs seemed to start settling back into his head after nearly popping out from the pressure. *Shame,* Shimura thought to himself, *of all the things I’ve seen, I still can’t cross protruding eyeballs off the list.*

The Chieftain came to his son’s side, checking on his well being while grunting a few times. The Sith were unsure of what he was saying, but it was soon clear to them as the Chieftain shooed them out to find the ruined temple.

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Ruined Sith Temple
Sepros

It took the group nearly four hours to reach the ruined Sith temple and another half hour went by before they found themselves deep within the temple. The Dark Side was so heavy there that it would drive almost any creature mad with prolonged exposure. Surprisingly, they’d hadn’t encountered a single life form, other than the vegetation that had overgrown the exterior of the ruins, a testament to the amount of time it had been abandoned. A magenta glow illuminated the dark, dank, stone hallways from the mixture of Shimura’s red saber and Liarah’s blue saber. The two Sith spearheaded the archaeological endeavor, the Wookiee hesitantly following down the hallway that could easily fit the three beings shoulder to shoulder .

“What exactly are we looking for again, Master?”

“Consul Locke didn’t say, just that we were looking for knowledge or an artifact.”

“A safeguard against Grand Master Pravus?” Liarah asked, connecting the dots of the recent machinations of the Dark Lord of the Sith.

“It’s only a matter of time before he knocks on our door.” Shimura added.

Liarah, lost in the conversation and her own thoughts, stumbled with an exclamation of surprise as she kicked something, sending it rolling further down the hallway with a clatter. The Wookiee barked, the sound resonating off the stone walls. Liarah held out her lighsaber, looking for whatever she had kicked. It wasn’t long before she found it, bending over she picked up the semi round, hard, smooth object. As she stood back up, she turned her wrist, bringing the object closer for a good look. Immediately she knew what she was looking at, a Human skull with two holes in the forehead, large enough to fit her thumbs through easily and devoid of any decomposition. Liarah turned to Shimura, who was curious to what she had found. She held up the skull, pointing its empty eye sockets at her master.

“Alas, poor Zoraan!” Liarah said, giggling.

“What?” Shimura asked.

Liarah shrugged. “It’s from a book a read. I changed the name for relevance.”

“Of course you read it somewhere.” Shimura sighed. “Let’s not end up with any more holes in our head than we already have.”

Pressing on, the further down the corridor they got, the more prevalent skeletons became, some intact, others missing various bones. The group still hadn’t found any fresh corpses, much to their agreement. It hadn’t been long before the walls gave way to a large room, its vastness incomprehensible to the Sith. In every direction they looked the gloom continued even as they kept walking forward. The sound of their boots reverberating off the stone was quickly muffled by the echo of the Wookiee’s long, hushed, anxious howl.

The Dark Side power began to get stronger as a sarcophagus slowly appeared from the gloom with every step they took. A skeleton lay draped over the stone coffin, its lower body completely missing. Three other skeletons were leaning against the coffin, all various sitting fashions. Shimura grabbed the skeleton on top of the sarcophagus by the shoulder and threw it behind him. The Keibatsu deactivated his lightsaber and clipped it to his belt.

“Liarah, keep the light over here.”

Shimura felt the Force crawl up his legs and arms, reveling in the strength it was granting him. The Sith stepped his right foot forward and placed both hands on the lid of the coffin, shoving it to the floor with a thud in one seamless motion. A mummy resided inside, dressed in purple and black robes, its head in a metallic headdress, covered in ornate symbols, its arms clutching a book to it’s chest. Shimura felt the Force amplification fade from his limbs, but had no problem wrestling the book free, destroying the preserved mummy in the process.

“It’s a tome...in a tomb.” Liarah said, making the words sound identical, laughing hysterically.

Shimura flipped through the oddly textured pages. He quickly recognized it for what it was, dry, crisp flesh. The inscriptions were in a language not familiar to him, but the diagrams made it evident that the book contained various rituals. “I think we have what we need, let’s get back to Locke.” Shimura said.

Turning around they were greeted with the snap-hiss of a lightsaber, its red glow illuminating a human female of average height, short black hair, wearing the robes of Grand Master Pravus’ Inquisitorius Order. “You don’t seem like the book reading type.” She said.

Shimura laughed. “Funny, you certainly look like the dying type.”

“I’m Sena Hardin, High Inquisitor of the Inquisitorius. Now that formalities are out of the way, why don’t you hand it over to me and I promise I’ll kill all three of you quickly.”

“Pravus will get this book over my dead body!” Liarah interjected, clearly not grasping the gravity of their situation. The Wookiee howled in agreement.

“That’s the idea.” The Inquisitor said with a deep chill in her voice.

The Inquisitor bent her knees and launched herself into a high arcing jump with the aid of the Force, a second red lightsaber erupting to life in midair. A thousand previous repetitions were called into play as Shimura dropped the book and resorted to muscle memory to effortless snag his saberstaff from his belt and ignite both blades. Liarah grabbed her DL-44 blaster pistol from its holster and unleashed two shots against her foe, one missing wildly and the other being redirected into the Wookiee’s shoulder, causing him to howl in pain.

The Human landed between the Zabrak and Zeltron, Shimura spun his lightsaber feigning an attack that the Inquisitor didn’t bite on. With her hands low on her lightsabers, her right hand made a wide, looping strike at Liarah that was carefully blocked. Swirling her lightsabers around, Sena blocked a slash at her midsection from the Battlemaster as she faced Shimura, evidently the greater threat to her life of the two.

Liarah disengaged from the melee, the Wookiee falling back closer to the entrance they had come from. Circling wide from the conflict, she now found herself looking onto the duel between her Master and the High Inquisitor, red plasma blades whirling and spinning with a clash into other plasma blades. Unsure of what to do with herself, she looked on, her concentration on the fight broken by a low growl behind her. Liarah turned toward the sound of the noise and raised her lightsaber to see.

A pair of red eyes were visible before the creature stalked its way out of the darkness. Standing nearly as tall as her, its massive head must’ve been three hands wide, horns protruding from its head, its teeth bared with saliva dripping from its mouth. *A tuk’ata!* Liarah knew the situation wasn’t good, based on what she had read at the Shadow Academy. Tuk’ata were force sensitive hounds that had been alchemically altered to be vicious protectors of Sith tombs.

Meanwhile Shimura and Sena engaged in a heated battle of parries, blocks and redirections, each masters of their combat form. The Battlemaster unleashed a swift assault, pairing a set of strikes to Sena’s head that had been blocked by a stationary spin. The Keibatsu saw the opening and willed the Force to increase his movement speed, dropping with his back to the High Inquisitor. He let loose a combination of wide linear sweeps around his body that bit deep into the exterior of Sena’s quadriceps. A pained cry emanated from the Pravus loyalist as she careened back from the pain, still somewhat able to hold herself up.

“Shimura!” Liarah cried. Shimura took the opportunity to look at his Apprentice, sprinting towards the door. Dread overcame him as he finally noticed the beast chasing her, and quickly gaining ground.

“Get to the door!” Shimura yelled as he took two steps to the door, almost forgetting to grab the book they had come for. He took off to the door, the Force increasing his movement speed again to cover more distance.

“Get back here with my book!” Sena shouted. Using the Force to dull her pain to allow her to move more quickly.

Liarah bolted past the unsuspecting Wookiee, sliding to a stop meters before the doorway they had came in. She turned around and shoved the Wookiee as hard as she could straight into the jaws of the tuk’ata. The sounds of tearing flesh and a screaming Wookie made Liarah’s skin crawl.

“Let’s go!” Shimura yelled as Liarah turned from the sight of the Wookiee being rent into multiple pieces, turning down the hallway. Shimura stopped, turning to the enormous burial room they had just left, the High Inquisitor seemingly ignoring the preoccupied tuk’ata.

“Give me the book.” Sena said with clear contempt.

“Enjoy the grave Pravus sent you to.” Shimura said, dropping the book from his right hand, coiling the Force around his hand as he thrust it forward with an open hand. A telekinetic blast hit Hardin in the chest, forcing the wind from her lungs and knocking her off her feet and backward several meters, well within the tomb room. Shimura deactivated his saber, clipping it to his belt. Closing his left hand in a fist and raising his arm towards the center of the ceiling near the mouth of the hallway, he tapped his bracer a single time. A hidden rocket sparked to life as it jumped from the Keibatsu’s arm, streaking towards the ceiling. The corridor shook as the rocket met the ceiling in an explosion, stone rubble sealing off the entrance.

The dull sounds humming lightsabers accompanied yelps from the tuk’ata, Sena screaming in terrified agony followed not too long after. Shimura wiped the sweat from his pale white brow and picked up the book once more, turning to his Apprentice. She deactivated her lightsaber and holstered her blaster since her Master didn’t seem concerned.

“We really need to work on your training. The two of us will be a force to be reckoned with soon enough.” Shimura said. Liarah grinned at the thought of her power being elevated. He raised his free hand, wrapping his fingers behind her jaw and using his thumb to caress her cheek. Liarah noticeably basking in the affection.

“I’m glad you’re ok. Let’s get this book back to Locke for decryption before that thing figures out how to dig. Hopefully the book contains something useful against Pravus.”