**“The Best Medicine”**

By Braecen Kaeth (4520)

*Teamwork Is Key*

**Scholae Palatinae Embassy**

**Arx, Brotherhood Space**

The pair walked in unison, their steps crashing onto the hard stone floor beneath their heel and sending a distinctive beat through the hallway. ***Click, clack, click, clack.*** They fell into the comfortable rhythm as wound through the complex towards its exit. Their path wound toward the perimeter in the fastest, most efficient path – the Elder would have it no other way. They left the sovereign territory of the Clan and crossed through the ornate gates that signified they were leaving their land and entering the Brotherhood’s domain. Darth Pravus’ domain.

 In this era, it was dangerous to leave the close confines of your allies. Never, in Braecen’s memory of the Brotherhood, had the Clans been so diminished by a Grand Master. In the reign of Grand Master Muz Keibatsu, they had become defiant and arrogant – openly challenging his rule, his power, and his patience. In the end, their anger had clouded the forthcoming tempest on the horizon from their vision. Darth Pravus had orchestrated their fall at one another’s hands. He turned them against one another and splintered their belief they could defy the Iron Throne.

 “Keep up,” the Elder snapped. “And stay tucked into my left side. Should things get *interesting* I want you to find co-“

 The thirteen year-old at his side, buried under a shock of medium length brown hair, interjected, “Find cover, lay down suppressive fire, and haul ass back to the Embassy.” It was a conversation they had been having quite often today. Derek’s green eyes burned with pride and a desire to prove himself to the older man. If he was to continue his quick ascent through the Brotherhood’s ranks, he would have to enlist the Quaestor of Excidium as his ally. *And a potent ally he would be,* the Sith Warrior thought.

 Braecen was not eager to find trouble. While his mind demanded efficiency, he opted for a longer, less travelled path towards his rendezvous. He believed that the absence of threats may be preferable than tipping their hand to everyone found in the center of town – the fastest way to get from one Clan’s complex to the next. He circumnavigated the center of Arx and continued his progress towards the Arcona Embassy. They were to meet an old friend, and mercenary, named Larrik Dul’vak. The cigar smoking, ill-natured man was exactly what the Dark Adept wanted to enlist in Excidium’s new, emerging network.

 The Dark Adept felt the tremor in the Force a moment before Derek shouted, “Incoming!” The younger man rolled head over feet towards a statue, he came up with his carbine in hand – the business end pointed towards the malicious threat bearing down on them. Braecen had rushed in the opposite direction, drawing both of his weapons and pressing his thumb down to activate them. ***Snap-hiss!*** The blades sprung to life with radiant, white flame. He held them firmly in his hand, ready to engage. He peeked his head from cover to have the Dark Side immediately recall the motion. A chunk of duracrete exploded just inches from his head as a blaster bolt screamed across the distance.

 Derek shed his cloak and revealed his ARC Trooper armor. It was vintage, but even though it was nearly four times his age, it still provided some of the best protection one could find near Wild Space. His blaster squawked as he repeatedly depressed the trigger and retaliated against the opening salvo. ***Pew, pew, pew.*** The shots were always in a trio, creating a cluster of bolts, a tactic frequently employed in the Scholae Palatinae military. Derek had taken his training seriously, adapting it to his own combat style. He drew on the Force, but only enough to give him a faint impression of where his foes were and when they were moving against him.

 Braecen considered their situation for a moment. He desperately wanted to build the network for Excidium, but it had to be done discreetly. This was not a discreet moment. He cursed, then began to fall back. “On me, Derek!” he shouted. The twin sabers weaving a basket of protection that deflected blaster bolts in indiscriminate directions. Derek initially resisted, wanting to continue his barrage against his foes. Despite his age, and emotions, he overcame them both and fell into position behind the Dark Adept using the momentary breaks in cover to snap a stray shot back towards his opponents. Though he was only thirteen, he recognized that – without reinforcements – the enemy could surround them and cut off any chance of escape. This was the tactically sound decision. Even if it hurt Excidium’s initial efforts.

 As they opened up the distance between their would-be attackers and retreated, the Quaestor found his voice. “Betrayed.” The Warrior could see a momentary crack in the confidence of his leader. It was unsettling, Derek believed that his veteran leader would know all the answers, play all the right cards, and defy the odds set against them. But that was the myth of being an Elder, not the actual reality. Since the destruction of Cocytus, the leadership of Scholae Palatinae had been pushed to the limit. Their offices were no longer signs of comfort or luxury, instead they had become desperate bids to protect the Clan, the House, or the Battle Team from further harm.

 Derek nodded, “Again, you mean.” When the Quaestor finally began to nod, Derek pulled a smile out of the man. “I bet it was the Wookies. Fleabags are always messing everything up. We should just destroy them all.” A broad grin broke out across the Elder’s face. A rare sign before the dark days set in, even rarer now in the wake of their tribulations. Braecen turned his bright blue eyes onto the younger Equite, looked him over once, and began to laugh. He laughed until it hurt. Despite all the setbacks, it felt good to release all the apprehension, guile, and intrigue for a moment.

 “Come on,” the Quaestor began, “let’s get back to the Embassy and see if the others had any luck.”