

Brothers in Arms



Written by
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39 ABY

Havoc Base, Battleteam Krennic's Former Barracks

Reiden sat at the bar where he used to gather with all of his allies in Battleteam Krennic's military forces. Memories flashed before his mind's eye and he smiled. There were some good times that had been spent both at the bar and within the larger structure as well. Of course, there were some bad times as well, especially after the fighting with the Meraxis Empire had come to a halt. So many people had died. Friends that he would never see again. Still, he and some others that he had grown close to in his time with Krennic made sure to meet up every now and then. They always remembered the fallen and shared what was new in their lives. While they may have moved on to other things, their bond still remained to this day.

He raised his glass from the bar top and gazed at its dark amber contents. It was a Corellian rum that had been stocked when someone in the army detachment – he couldn't remember who – had learned that was where Reiden was originally from. And it wasn't the cheap stuff either, but rather something of quality. Part of him had wondered how much it must have cost to purchase and ship, while another part had wondered if it was purchased at all or acquired through alternative means. Given the full flavor, he was inclined to believe it was the genuine article, and that was enough for him. Truth be told, the logistics of how exactly it had arrived in the barracks were unimportant. It was a gesture that he had appreciated at the time.

He brought the glass to his lips and drained the dregs that remained. He savored the flavor and how it warmed the back of his throat.

But the warming soon became burning. The burning turned into the smell of smoke. Flames leapt in his mind's eye and he was suddenly back in the time of the final confrontation with the Meraxis Empire.

He remembered the destruction of Krennic's flagship, the Aegis. Most of the crew had been lucky enough to escape, but some decided to stay behind to buy time for the others. The ship's commanding officer, Lt. Col. Evan Pierce, was the first to volunteer to stay behind. But that wasn't quite right. He had insisted on it at the time, saying it was only the right thing to do – a commander always goes down with his ship.

His memories next went to the more recent fighting with The Republic of the Force, engaging them in space before making their way to the surface on Seraph. So much fighting. So many lives lost, snuffed out before it was their time. He recalled Crix Tares, the Jedi that had given him so much trouble ever since he boarded one of TRF's Marauder-class corvettes. Tares was skilled, possibly more skilled than any Reiden had fought before – at least, those he could remember. There had been so many over the years, after all.

He refilled his glass and took a small sip. His mind returned to the battle once again.

Tares had been adamant from the start in his belief that Scholae had been responsible for the death of TRF's beloved leader, Master Troykal Berckur. It didn't matter what he or Orion had said, that firm belief held true in the Jedi's mind. The duel had been fierce and, were it not for Orion's aid, Reiden hadn't been sure if he would make it out alive. By the end of it, Tares was so sure of himself and his position that he had dipped into the dark side and summoned lightning in an attempt at justice for his slain leader. It had almost cost Orion his life. But Reiden had reacted quickly, putting a stop to the attack and then the man's very life. Tares was wounded and wasn't going anywhere, but still he fought. Reiden had no other choice.

At least, that's what he told himself. He had severed the hand that had been on the verge of manifesting lightning. He could have easily stopped there. But he didn't. He felt that Tares, even wounded and left one-handed, was still enough of a threat to warrant further action. So, he had extinguished the man's life. Stabbed him through the chest. But his friend was saved. That made it okay, didn't it? Reiden didn't know.

He took another sip from the glass in his hand.

It was that very friend who had requested they meet tonight. He had already been visiting Havoc Base, so he told the bounty hunter to join him. Reiden would sometimes make trips to the barracks to train in peace or even meditate. Other times, he went there just to be alone, to get away from it all. Sure, a barracks may have been an odd choice for that, but it held some good memories of some good people. Those memories had drawn him back, as they occasionally did after going to battle.

He had slowly paced the halls and even fired off a few shots at the holographic firing range – making sure to keep his blaster set to stun this time so that the back wall didn't get scorched from the bolts, like it did on his previous visit. Now he was just having a quick drink while he waited for Orion to show up. He didn't have anything else planned that night, so he didn't mind sticking around a bit longer.

He heard the entry door hiss open and slide shut. He knew it was Orion arriving, even without reaching out in the Force to confirm it. As he heard footsteps approaching, he lifted his free hand and raised a finger. A second glass of rum that had been sitting on the bar hovered into the air and, with the spinning of his finger and directing it towards Orion, the glass floated over to him. The bounty hunter accepted it with a nod of thanks.

Orion took a sip of the amber-colored liquor as he walked up to the bar. It was then that Reiden noticed he was carrying something in his other hand. If the Kiffar noticed his attention, he gave no indication.

“So, why did you want to meet up tonight?” Reiden inquired, his curiosity finally getting the better of him.

"Well, I thought we were due for something after everything that's gone on." He began ticking items off with his fingers. "Between the assassination of Master Berckur, what happened in Tokare, and then Rigel Syklan rearing his ugly mug again when we went to that island? Yeah, I'd say a drink was in order, wouldn't you?"

Reiden chuckled softly. "Yeah, I suppose you're right about that." He tilted his head at what his friend was carrying. Closer now, he could tell that it was a small metal case, but there didn't seem to be any kind of identifying marks on it. "What's with that?"

"Oh, this thing? It's the other reason why I wanted to meet," Orion said as he flashed a grin, his eyes shining with a hint of mischief. He lifted the case and set it down on the bar top, spinning it so the latch faced Reiden. "After what went down with that Tares guy, you know, the whole almost-fried-by-lightning thing? I figured I owed you. So, I got you a little something."

Reiden raised an eyebrow as he undid the latch, looking at his friend. But the bounty hunter merely urged him on. He turned his gaze back to the case and opened it. Inside, nestled within protective foam, was a blaster. He let out a low whistle at the sight of the weapon. He had seen and held many weapons over the years and the craftsmanship on this one was truly exceptional. It was based on a WESTAR-35, the same model he currently used, but with a couple modifications. The barrel was boxier than the standard design and the grip was ergonomic with a slight curve.

"It's beautiful," he finally said softly. He would have said more, but one little detail caught his eye and rendered him silent. There, on the handle, was a familiar crest he had seen often enough before – a stylized wolf's head. His hand reached out, hovering over the design, almost afraid to touch it. He looked at his friend in disbelief. "Is this...?"

"Yup. That's my family's crest, right there," the bounty hunter said with a nod, grinning. "I've called you brother before, right? But, see, that's not just a word I throw around – I don't use it lightly. We're family. Have been for a while now. This," he gestured at the blaster and its engraved handle, "is just a reminder of that."

Reiden said nothing. What was there to say? He had lost his own family eighteen years ago. It took him a while to let others in, even longer to feel like he belonged anywhere. Scholae Palatinae was his home now, and he had friends there...or allies, at the very least. Then there was Shadow and her twin boys, they called him their uncle. Of course, the more he thought about it, the more he knew Orion was right. After all they had been through, saving each other's lives countless times over, that wasn't just an ally or a friend you could count on. No, it went deeper than that. Each trusted the other implicitly. He knew that, no matter what, Orion has his back, just as he had Orion's. They weren't just comrades in arms. They really were family – the people that were with you at your best and helped lift you up at your worst.

He looked down at the blaster for a moment, then took out his old one and set it on the bar. His hand hovered over the new weapon before his fingers closed around it, pulling it free from the case. He admired the design, his gaze lingering briefly on the wolf crest before he holstered the weapon.

Family, huh? Gotta say, I like the sound of that.

A tear rolled down his cheek, but he quickly wiped it away. He looked up at Orion and smiled. "You know, even when I was a kid, I always wondered what having a sister or brother would be like. Guess now I know."

"Damn straight," Orion grinned back.

"Thanks man, I appreciate it, really. It's a great blaster, too. Great craftsmanship."

"Well, I should hope so," Orion laughed. "I had a little help. Asked around with some of my contacts, even reached out to that old boss of yours, Zukalo." Reiden was surprised to hear the name, but not that the Weequay had a hand in helping out. "I'll tell you something, Rei. That Zukalo kept singing your praises, said it just hasn't been the same since you left. You know, I think he misses you."

Reiden laughed. "Well, I did do good work for him back then. So, what happened after that?"

"Right. Anyway, I told them I wanted to get something special made and Zukalo gave me a name. Turns out, Savo Graal – you know, that guy I was guarding on Arkyn back when we first met? Well, he suggested the same guy that Zukalo told me about. So, I figured if the arms maker was good enough for people in those two very different social circles, that's the man I wanted for this job."

Reiden thought back to that day all those years ago when he had, quite literally, run into Orion. The memory made him laugh. At the time, he never would have guessed that things would turn out the way they had. It just goes to show you that sometimes the best things in life are completely unexpected and happen by accident.

"I guess I'll have to thank that crazy Zukalo for this, maybe even get *him* a gift" Reiden said, shaking his head. "And Graal, too."

"Hey man, totally up to you. But, while we're here...you wanna take that thing out for a spin?" Orion tilted his head in the direction of the firing range.

"Yeah, why not?"

He didn't even finish his drink before turning towards the range, he merely set the glass down on the bar. As he got closer, he slid the blaster from his holster and flicked off

the safety with his thumb, setting the weapon to stun. His other hand jabbed at the button to start up the training program when he reached his destination.

The holo-targets flickered slightly as they whirled to life. Reiden raised his right hand, then brought up his left to steady it as he lined up a shot. He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. He squeezed the trigger as he did, quickly firing off a trio of shots. The target flashed and small red X's appeared where shots were registered.

Reiden grunted at the sight. His aim was a bit off, but it was close enough. "Guess I must be tired or something."

"Yeah, I'm sure that's it. The alcohol has nothing to do with it," Orion teased.

Reiden was silent for a moment before quietly muttering, "Shut up..."

I guess this is part of what having a brother is like, too. It doesn't seem so bad, basically the same as usual.

"Come on, man, let's get out of here," Orion said. "I heard that Sloane and some of the others are getting together tonight. What do you say we go meet up with them?"

"Yeah, sounds like fun."

As the two headed towards the exit and ventured out into the crisp night air, one thing was certain in Reiden's mind. Family was more than just blood – it was also the people you choose. So far, he felt like he had found a pretty good one when it came to his close friends. And, really, that's all he could have hoped for.