[Pro Bowl V: Week One] Homeward Bound

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On the Side Lines

The old freighter, its matte black finish pocked and scoured with burns and debris collisions, gracelessly settled on the landing pad. The ship had been lashed with rain since breaking through the final cloud layer, creating runnels of grime and dust all along her edges. As the skids touched down, she sagged as the hydraulics accommodated her weight.

Archangel Palpatine strode down the boarding ramp of the YT-2000 ‘Heart of Gold’, his noble chariot for his long sojourn. The old girl had been a workhouse in her former life as a cargo lifter and convoy escort. Since he had purchased her second hand from a derelict yard years ago, he had paid almost her sticker price to replace every worn-out component and upgrade her systems to military standard. Now, she rested on her skids as a weary runner might collapse at the end of an endurance race, slack and listless.

He patted the ramp’s actuator before stepping out onto the landing pad. It was his first time on this world, and if he had been honest to himself, it was disappointing. When he had left, the Clan had controlled several major worlds in the form of Ptolomea, Caina, Judecca, and Antenora. This damp and unremarkable world was where his former Clan had meekly eked out a living, controlling just the one city instead of the entire solar system as they had before.

Archangel was not meek, by any definition of the word. At times, he has been described as taciturn, stubborn, and downright dismissive, but when a call arose for fighters to stand for the Clan, he was always one of the first to volunteer. And fight he did. As a general, he had won countless victories, either standing upon the bridge of an Imperial Star Destroyer, or side-by-side with his troop commanders at a field headquarters.

However, it was in the heat of battle, where hand-to-hand combat was inevitable and bloody beyond reason, where he excelled. Built with ursine proportions, with a broad trunk crested with mighty shoulders, he was a warrior with few equals. The moment his lightsaber was ignited, his control diminished, his morals washed away, and his inhibitions quelled by a tsunami of rage.

Striding through battle as a minister of war, his blade danced with furious sweeps, the seams of his armor squealing in protest. The rage fueled his movements, guided him through the maelstrom of bodies, blaster bolts, and debris. It usually helped him find the nearest enemy force user, where his mettle could be tested.

He could taste the blood, the sickly metallic twang, as he battled lightsaber to lightsaber. It was rare for him to even worry about whose blood it was. He had been a part of over a hundred lightsaber duels, and had come out alive each time, though occasionally barely so. Though receiving wounds and injuries were part and parcel of his existence, he bore the scars he earned with pride. His back and arms were a mass of disfiguring and overlapping flesh, stitch marks, and burns.

This was what he lived for. He was a berserker, a weapon of mass destruction poised to be unleashed at a moment’s notice. He didn’t especially like this epitaph, the loss of control was almost always absolute, and there were, at times, moments where he startled even himself with the inherent ferocity of his assaults. He had spent decades honing his abilities to make him the tip of the Palatinae spear, but lately… he had been having his doubts.

Which is why he left, among other reasons, to lead a solitary life as a Rogue. Four years he spent drifting, avoiding people and communities. He did not belong to any other faction or population which he might come across. He was a Palpatine, his heart pumped Scholae Palatinae blood through his veins, and he could not stand to bear any other banner.

So alone he trekked, not searching or aimless, but directed movements which brought him from location to location. His feet were not the only part of him wandering. His thoughts swam with the decades of fighting, the overwhelming rage, and the terrible periods of time after the battles had been won and he had to rein in the beast. It had become very difficult of late, to shackle the anger, to lock it back in its cage until the next time it was ready to be unleashed.

This is why he had stood on the sidelines as the latest Vendetta had raged on. He had heard of it, obviously. He was a Palpatine after all. Hails had gone out across the Holonet, calling the long-lost sons and daughters of Clan Scholae Palatinae to arms. He had not answered the call. But instead, he had chosen to remain in solitude, to watch, to wait, to examine not only his past, but also his future.

His blood sang and yearned for war, however. After a time, he realized that there was no way to escape his life, as it had become. He was a weapon to be used at the discretion of the Empress. And he had been away far too long. War was his function in this galaxy, and he was damn good at it. He could feel the familiar rush of adrenaline at the thought of wading into battle once more, the sweep of the blade, the sear of ozone in his throat, the screams of the dying and the maimed…

He hadn’t realized his eyes had been closed, the rain cutting clean trails through the grime on his face. His eyes blinked away the water, and he shook his head to clear the rest. The ‘Heart of Gold’ provided little protection from the elements, especially when they chose to assault him at a 45-degree angle. He tapped his wrist-mounted control panel, and the boarding ramp shuddered slowly back into its nested position in the underside of the vessel.

No one greeted him. This was not wholly unexpected, but disappointing none the less. He made his way to the entry portal, ducking down to keep from striking his head against the awning which now protected him from the rain. The portal slide back, allowing a waft of damp, unpleasant air to filter out of the space port’s terminal. A bored looking Zabrak sat at a customs and information desk just inside.

“Name?” he asked, toneless and without rancor or mirth. He hadn’t even looked up from his papers.

“Archangel Palpatine,” the giant man replied, tapping his armored gauntlet finger against the plasteel shell on his thigh. The Zabrak paused for a moment, his brow furrowing. As his head started to rise, first noticing the tapping finger, then the massive chest, before finally summitting at the man’s face, his terror took over. He began to sputter, his hands shaking nervously as he shuffled through his papers in an effort to find a particular document or perhaps a forcefield to hide behind.

“I’ll take it from here,” said a quiet voice from behind the Zabrak. A stocky, blue skilled man strode towards the customs desk, uniform neat and proper. Archangels’ opinion of the man was immediately improved as the officer patted the Zabrak on the shoulder to calm him for a moment, before addressing the larger man.

“My Lord,” the officer said, his tone clipped and martial, “I am Captain Raleien Sonavarret, welcome home.”