Lorefest September 2021 – Variant: Joining the Brotherhood

Warlord Archangel Palpatine

PIN: 7589

Old Man’s Last Hoorah

The caf had cooled in his hand, as he stared into its muddy brown depths. It was quiet in the small eating establishment, a couple Rodians in the corner jabbering away in their indecipherable mess of a language. He was alone, enjoying the space at the counter for once. Large men typically found little comfort in areas designed for the average humanoid, and he was larger than most. He took a sip, made a face at the awful taste, but enjoyed the slight jolt of caffeine.

“Ah, there he is!” a sardonic voice chortled behind him. The speaker had managed to inflect a remarkable amount of vitriolic gutter humor into a voice which would make a congested rat feel awkward. The man at the counter closed his eyes and sighed. The

“Now, now, my friend,” the newcomer said, moving towards the man purposefully, “is that really the way to greet an old friend?”

He feigned hurt and disappointment, his hand clutching at his stained and tattered flight suit just above where his heart ought to be, but probably wasn’t. Grezz had done enough horrifying and cruel deeds in his day to fill a prison barge, and though he was a dangerous individual, he did love his theatrics. An audience might even have noticed the slight dampness to his eyes, and the slight crinkle to his nose, as if he were a moment away from crying.

The blaster pistol snapped out of its holster and was levelled at the newcomer’s pimpled nose in an instant. Its power pack whirred slightly, charging up slowly to a higher level of lethality. The only thing keeping this individual’s brains, what little there were available, within their current holdings was one relaxed trigger finger.

The newcomer squeaked in shock, his hands shooting up in alarm. Gone were the crocodile tears and vapid theatrics, replaced with a shockingly pervasive sweaty brow, and eyes the size of Jawas. The huge, armored man at the counter turned, and looked him right in the saucer like eyes, the pistol barely moving, following a slow figure of eight pattern. The large man was tired, it was early, and the caf had not been strong enough to take an edge off the fatigue.

“What do you want, Grezz?” he growled, but he sagged slightly, the pistol lowering a touch as his aged muscles tried to keep it level. He was getting on in years, and his life was catching up to him. The stubble on his chin, far too long to be called five o’clock shadow, grated against the faded pauldron of his armor. His skin had taken on an unhealthy pallor, such as one who had fled the sunlight, and dwelt only in the shadows and the undercroft. He was a mess.

“Don’t do anything hasty, B!” the rat-like man sputtered, his spine arching slightly as if to reduce his size, but only managing to move his vitals more squarely into the sights of the lowered pistol. The larger man shook his head once, ending Grezz’s retreat before it could happen. It seemed to Grezz that he had bitten off more than he could chew… or stomach.

“I’m only here to give you a warning!” he continued. The huge man, Brodo, could see a bead of sweat well up from the man’s unkempt and greying brow and begin its arduous descent through the layers of grime covering his face. Oh, what a life he led, consorting with creatures such as Grezz, who could barely be described as sapient, let alone intelligent.

“And who gave you this warning for me, Grezz? Was it the Hutts? I thought I had killed enough of their minions to make them think twice.”

His voice had seen better days as well. It had commanded legions into battle, led charges across war-torn cities, and had sung victory songs and laments for the dead. As he spoke, he could feel his vocal cords tightening, stress and poor air quality reducing their effectiveness, and hampering his usual bass into a sharp, crackling timbre. Grezz did his best not to react to the large man’s failing voice, not a quiver of his lips. He didn’t need another hole in his body. There was so little unadulterated real estate left.

“The Hutts send me, B, but not from themselves!”, he stammered, tripping over his words in his haste to convey his message and flee, “But from the Republic!”

The huge man seemed to pause for a moment, his pistol quivering again. It was a heavy pistol, one of the most powerful he could afford, but its weight made long stand-offs difficult. Grezz watched the end of the pistol, his flop sweat threatening to overwhelm his dwindling crop of hair. Brodo slipped off the counter stool, his heavy boots landing firmly on the rough metal surfaces.

“The Republic?” he asked, his brow furrowing over his deep-set eyes, “Why would they care about me?”

Grezz blanched, his jaw slackening in shock. The huge man before him, though old and clearly down on his luck, with decrepit armor and waning strength, had always been one of the first to know if something was afoot, especially if there was money to be made. How had he not heard?

“There’s a bounty on your head! Crimes against the Republic!”

The Rodians stopped their chatter. A nearby server stopped in his tracks, the caf carafe in his hand momentarily forgotten. Grezz had been… unfortunately loud. Brodo shot him through the meat of his thigh and kicked him over as the poor rat screamed in pain and terror. The rest of the diner’s occupants scattered, diving under tables for cover, some reaching for their own weapons. Brodo swung his blaster around as he made for the exit, firing above the heads of the patrons, blasting huge gaps in the cheap sheet metal walls.

He burst through the diner’s doors, the hinges buckling under the pressure of his weight. Angry Rodian buzzing rose up from behind him, and several streaks of green laser zipped through the air around him. Nearby shoppers, presumably innocent and just out for a late morning stroll, screamed and fled in every direction. Brodo continued to fire into the café, not really aiming, just trying to keep their heads down.

An inconveniently placed set of trash receptacles blocked his egress, tripping him and sending him sprawling to the floor in a clatter of armor and swearing. His knee burned with pain, and he gritted his teeth as he scrambled forward, his blaster scrapping against the metal of the corridor floor. An alarm klaxon sounded, followed swiftly by strobing red and yellow lights.

He fled through the corridors of the space station, Grezz’s howls of pain fading with each corner he turned. Grezz had always been a snake and a rat… a strange snake-rat combination, that only a mother could love. Shooting him was impolite, Brodo knew, but all the fool would’ve done is try to blackmail him. Even if he were susceptible, Brodo barely had two credits to rub together.

His headlong tactical retreat ended abruptly, with a trio of blaster rifle muzzles leveled directly at his face. Brodo stopped dead, transfixed by the potential of a painful, scorching end of his long life. His eyes moved slowly up to look at the visors of the Republic troopers in front of him.

“Brodo Tainer. You are charged with crimes against the Republic, sedition, treason, murder, and mayhem,” the sergeant of the trio said grimly, his companions chuckling menacingly. One, a female human built to roughly the same specifications as a Titan dropship, leered at Brodo with unrestricted avarice and condescension.

“You just added that mayhem bit!” Brodo protested, moments before a rifle butt lashed out at his temple. He dipped under it, and stepped forward, driving his massive fist into the sergeant’s crotch. The man crumpled, with a gentle, gutless whiny. His companions paused in horror for a moment, before starting to react.

Brodo slide to his right, keeping low and kicked the side of the woman’s knee, snapping cartilage and sinew. She howled for a long moment before an elbow to the teeth gave her other things to worry about. Brodo allowed himself a self-satisfied grin. The stun bolt hit him square between the shoulder blades, just where the Imperial and Republic training academies taught you to aim. It was the largest flat space on most humanoids for the bolt to interact with. Sometimes, these academies should consider than many of the denizens of the darker parts of the galaxy were former soldiers, and thus knew this.

The electrical circuits in Brodo’s armor sleeve dissipated the stun bolt, warming his skin uncomfortably, but certainly less injurious than if the bolt had connected as it was meant to. Sometimes you can teach an old dog a new trick. Sometimes that old dog gets tired of taking stun bolts from security forces and targets, and he has to do something about it. A few singed hairs notwithstanding.

He spun, surprising the young trooper with a headbutt to the bridge of his nose. Blood spurted immediately from the damaged proboscis, and he staggered back. Brodo moved to continue his advance, to maintain his advantage, and perhaps score some better armor pieces. The sergeant had been a heft individual, and he was not above raiding the woman’s equipment if it fit.

The trooper tripped and landed hard on his rear, his hands trying to stem the flow of blood from this nose. Brodo aimed a heavy boot at the man’s nethers but stopped halfway through the motion. A blaster barrel had been pressed against the back of his neck, right behind the armor collar.

“Do it,” a voice hissed, right in his ear, “Your brains would be municipal decoration before you could connect”

Brodo thought for a long moment, the face of the young, injured trooper before him featured both abject terror and pain. But, as they say, discretion is the better part of valor. He relented, lowering his leg back to the deck, and raising his hands in surrender. The blaster barrel didn’t move, but a knee slammed into his back, pushing him to the floor. A pair of electro-cuffs were slapped onto his wrists.

“Brodo Tainer, do you know your rights as…”

“Of course, I do. This won’t be my first time in prison, and it won’t be my last”