

PART IX: REBO JOON

A sudden jolt of pain in his left thigh jerked Rebo back into the real world, and he keeled over to one side in the mud, his left hand instinctively groping at the wound on his leg as if to claw the pain away. Standing over him, Ghoss had appeared as suddenly as a ghost, finishing a gesture with his right hand and then bringing his rifle up to fire a short burst of plasma into the robed figure in front of them. The figure slumped, the spear it had been about to thrust into Rebo's face falling to the ground. Rebo looked down at his thigh and removed his hand to see that a blaster shot had torn a rift in his trousers and singed the skin and flesh beneath. A faint wisp of smoke was still coming from it.

“Sir, you'd better move,” Ghoss shouted and fired another burst at something Rebo couldn't see. He looked around to orient himself. They were still in that tiny mud hut settlement on Shiva IV. *But if I were here the whole time, how could I have been...* He shook away the thought and clenched his teeth as he got to his feet – he'd had worse than that little strafe wound before – then he spotted Toron running East and followed suit, leaving Ghoss to cover their retreat. They had been discovered now anyway, they might as well trade stealth for speed. When he realised he still had his pistol in his hand, he halted and fired a few shots to cover Ghoss as he withdrew after them. Not that it was necessary – the spear-wielding villagers had more than enough to deal with, it seemed. Somehow all this reminded him of Cydon. *I was just back there, that might be why. Or it felt like I was.* As Ghoss passed him again, he followed, but slinked into hiding behind a wall after a couple of meters, his left hand rummaging through the pockets in his belt for something to cover up the wound with.

“Damn this leg,” he mumbled and fired a few shots at a hooded head that came poking forth from behind a wall. A third shot slammed into the wall from a different angle, and Rebo remembered Kavilo up on the hill. Glancing down at the burn on his thigh, he suddenly put two and two together. *Kavilo, you bloody son of a bantha. You bloody shot me!* Granted, it did wake him up from whatever nightmare world he had been pulled into. He pulled out some mesh tape and wound it once around his thigh, then looked the other way and saw Toron bent over another robed body, picking a spear out of a limp hand and throwing it to the side just in case. Suppressing the urge to

run back up the hill and peel the skin off Kavilo's face, Rebo gritted his teeth and approached the Kel Dor cautiously, still on the lookout for more robes. How many could there be? From what they had seen from the hill, no more than fifty all together. *But you can handle fifty, can't you? You've done it before.* He suppressed the urge to groan.

Ghoss had disappeared again, probably hiding, so Rebo dismissed him and followed close on Toron's heels in the direction of the guarded hut. The mesh tape pulled at his burn, but he ignored it, making broad sweeps of the surroundings as they closed in on their location. He briefly wondered what the radiation levels could be out here; probably not very high. Still, that burn would need a thorough cleaning later. At least it wasn't a filthy spear wound.

As they got there, the guarded hut wasn't very guarded anymore. At their approach the one guard that was left turned to face them, spear clasped in both hands. "Drop the weapon," Rebo said, raising his pistol, and to Toron: "Where's the other guard?" Toron turned around, and then he suddenly seemed to be thrown through the air, getting knocked against the wall of the hut and then slammed to the muddy ground. Rebo cursed inside, knowing that they were out of Kavilo's sight right now. The guard took a step towards Toron, the tip of his spear hovering just over the Kel Dor's throat.

"I believe you are the one who should let go of your weapon," the robed figure said. *So you do talk, do you?* Rebo shot a glance towards Toron. The Kel Dor lay crumpled on the ground against the wall, but Rebo could see he wasn't completely out of it. And Ghoss was around, somewhere. He hoped. Never the less, he would have to take a chance. *If I want to save the Corporal's life, that is.* He decided that he did.

"Alright," he said. Slowly, he bent down and let the pistol slip out of his grip and into the mud, then kicked it over by the guard's feet. Another guard stepped forth, spear trained on him, and he kept his hands visible, waiting for Toron to shake the blow off and make a move. *He needs more time,* Rebo realised. *I need to buy him some bloody time. Ghoss, where the fuck are you?* "So," he said. "Mind telling me why you took our Lieutenant?"

"You are in no position to ask questions," the first guard said. "You attack our Order, and you think you have any rights?"

"I don't know of any bloody order," Rebo answered testily. "And in all fairness, you started it by abducting the bloody Lieutenant."

"Enough of this," the second guard said. "Bind them."

I don't bloody think so. As the first guard lifted the tip of his spear away from Toron's throat

and took a step forward, Rebo whipped out his second pistol and fired it in one, fluid motion; and at the same time, Toron's hand shot out and grabbed the pistol that had been kicked away, raising it to fire at the second guard. The rapidly successive shots rang out, and Rebo and Toron threw themselves in opposite directions away from the spear-wielding guards. *Spears aren't the only weapons these fuckers are wielding*, Rebo reminded himself as he felt a powerful push to his back and crashed face first into the wall of one of the huts. More shots were fired behind him, and then he heard a sickly sound of meat and bones being carelessly skewered. *So much for the bloody Corporal's life*, he thought, more annoyed than anything else. *That gamble cost me my best blaster, too*. He got to his feet, using his momentum to dodge another thrust from a spear. *What is with these guys and bloody spears?* The mud on the ground made it hard to keep his footing, and he stumbled inelegantly out of reach from his attacker, still dizzy from the violent meeting with the wall. On the ground over by the second cloaked figure he could see Toron laying on his back in the mud, a spear thoroughly planted in his torso like a toothpick in a Dacci shrimp. *Fuck*. Rebo tapped his earpiece. "Ghoss, where in bloody carnation are you? If you're dead I swear I'm coming to kick your bloody corpse!" Then he tapped it again, going out to everyone's channel. "The Lieutenant isn't here," he said. "It was a bloody set up. The Corporal's down, I repeat; man down!"

"Stay your ground," a deep voice said over the com. *Crayl*. "We're coming to you."

Stay my ground? Not bloody likely. Still firing at his attackers, Rebo weaved away from them and retreated from the scene, hoping to draw the robed fuckers out into the area where Kavilo could pick them off.