

EPILOGUE: REBO JOON

Finally back on *Iron Integrity*, Rebo was closely examining the contents of an almost full bottle of cheap Abregado whiskey when a confident rap on his door made him abandon the urge to get pissing drunk long enough to answer. He was a little surprised to see Arcoh Genarik standing outside, hands on her hips, the power armour abandoned for a tight-fitting set of overalls. Her long, white hair wasn't put up in a strict, greyish tail as it usually was, but looked washed, hanging loose and white down her shoulders. She smelled faintly of what he thought could be some kind of flower. A purple mark still showed on her forehead after the blow to the head earlier; by now the only physical evidence left that she had in fact been in a serious combat situation within the last twenty-four hours.

“Genarik,” he said. “What the fuck are you doing here.”

“Didn't you want your blaster back?” She tilted her head. Unlike him, he had almost forgotten about the missing weapon, too busy churning his thoughts as usual, especially after the unpleasant trip down Memory Lane down on the planet. He suddenly wasn't sure if that was all she wanted, though, and her all-white eyes didn't exactly give away her thoughts.

“Good girl,” Rebo said chidingly. “Was that all?”

“No,” she said and pushed past him into his cabin, throwing the blaster onto the bed. “Painkillers. For my head. You're a doctor, right?”

“What makes you think I keep meds in my room?”

“You keep everything in your room, just in case,” she said. “Everybody knows that. So just give me something, okay?”

Oh, I'll give you something, Rebo thought, but it ended there. “I thought Ghoss would have painkillers,” he said instead. “He's your bloody medic, isn't he?”

“Fucker wouldn't give me any,” she mumbled. “Said I might have a concussion and that I shouldn't take anything that'll make me sleepy. Which means he won't let me drink, either.” She picked up the whiskey bottle and looked at the label. “Says it thins the blood. It's supposed to be bad for me or whatever.”

“Why don't you jump into bed with him and see if he changes his bloody mind then?” Rebo

asked. “He seems into you. Use your womanly wiles. Or is Lieutenant Noraal more your cup of tea?” At those last words she spun around, her face briefly contorted into rage. Rebo worried for a second that she would throw the whiskey bottle at him, but she didn't. Instead the rage faded quickly into what could best be described as mild loathing.

“I don't like what you're suggesting, Doctor,” she spat. “But I tell you what – you don't *know* me. You don't know anything *about* me.”

Oh but I do, he thought to himself. *You're angry, crude and unpleasant, which is why no one really likes you. You've been slighted and now you want revenge; that's why you're here. Then one person shows up in this Galaxy who seems to care about you and you develop instant loyalty, you do what it takes, you fall in line, you'd give your life. All for some bloody recognition. At least you don't have to split your focus between your loyalty to Keyan and your love for... No!* He expelled the image of Tia from his mind. She had moved on. He had to do the same, or he would go insane. *She's Racin bloody Salaros' problem now, not mine.* He turned to Arcoh. “I don't know what you expect to gain from mooning after Noraal,” he said. “But I do know your priorities are bloody skewed.”

“In all fucking respect, Doctor,” she said, her voice everything but respectful. “Shut your fucking mouth. I know where you've been. You've got nothing on me.”

“Maybe I don't,” he said. “But I've got something you want.” He smiled.

“You have nothing I could possibly want,” she said.

“I have a bottle full of bloody awful whiskey.” He nodded to the bottle she was still holding in her right hand.

“*Half* full,” she said, eyes narrowing.

“Half full, half empty,” Rebo said. “Oldest bloody disagreement in the history of the bloody Galaxy. Who cares. You want some?”

For a moment it looked like she was considering throwing the bottle in his face, but then she shrugged instead. “Sure,” she said and sat down on his bed. “Have any cups?” He shook his head, and she unscrewed the cap and put the bottle to her lips. “Fucking bantha piss,” she mumbled and took another good swallow before passing the bottle. He sat down beside her and had a gulp, the cheap taste numbing his throat. “Jak saved my life once,” she said suddenly and took the bottle back, had a smaller sip this time. “Yeah, I fell in love with that. With him. I thought it meant something. Fucking stupid, but there you have it. Come on, just tell me. You're dying to tell me that's so fucking skewed, right?”

“I'd rather not,” Rebo said sardonically. “You'd just kick my face in.” He took the bottle back. Plenty left. He had a long drink from it, feeling the light buzz that had already started humming just behind his cheekbones. “And I'll tell you... assaulting a superior officer – not a good rep to have.”

“Yeah,” she said, giving a short snort of laughter. “*Superior officer.*” She said the word as though she thought it laughable, and he knew that, in part, she was right for thinking that. It *was* laughable. In the Imperial Forces, he would most likely never have risen beyond Corporal. And he hadn't minded before. He wouldn't have minded now, either, if it hadn't been for Keyan giving him a rank he was in no manner the right man for. Run the infirmary, sure. He could do that. But he didn't need a Colonel's rank to do it. Just another case of the megalomaniacal Keyan Pressin, giving out promotions left and right because it suited him to do so and because he knew it would piss off the Alliance leadership. Which it did, and then some.

They passed the bottle back and forth in silence for a while after that, not even so much as looking at each other. The drink made Rebo's mind wander, stepping carefully around those trails that might take him back to Tia. After a while he realised he couldn't find anything interesting to think about, and settled for the mental image of Arcoh naked. She was still a creepy fucking ice queen, but her body was tight, and she was sitting right next to him.

“Do you think I'm pretty?” she asked all of a sudden, her voice slurred from the whiskey.

“No,” Rebo replied instinctively. “But I think you're hot.” He suppressed a snigger at the paradox of an ice queen being hot, then flinched involuntarily, his body preparing for a punch in the nose that never came. He looked over at Arcoh, who seemed to be staring through the wall and out into hyperspace.

“Jak probably doesn't think I'm pretty either,” she said, her voice smaller and sadder than Rebo thought she would be capable of. Anyone else would probably have felt sorry for her right then, but he just couldn't muster the energy for it. Besides, she sounded completely retarded. *That's what bloody love does to you.* He took the bottle from her and examined the contents. There was hardly any left. “Do you think Jak would be jealous if I slept with someone else?” she asked suddenly. “Like Ghost. Do you think I should sleep with Ghost?”

“I honestly don't bloody care,” Rebo replied.

“*You* think I'm hot,” she stated, as though she had just come up with the idea herself. “You want to sleep with me, don't you?” She turned to him, possibly examining him with her freaky, all-white eyes, possibly not being able to focus properly. It was impossible to know, since she had no

distinguishable pupils.

“I wouldn't turn down a bloody offer,” he said guardedly, not sure if she wanted him to actually sleep with her or if she was just looking for an excuse to kick the crap out of him for even thinking about it.

“I would *never* sleep with *you*,” she said, pulling closer to him. He could feel the warmth from her body. She took his cap off and leaned in, kissing him clumsily on the lips before looking him straight in the eyes. *Not in agreement with ourselves, are we?* Rebo thought distantly to himself. Still expecting a punch in the nose, he said nothing. “I think,” she said then, pausing, grimacing with the effort to find the right words. “You're a good little soldier man, but.. other than that – I think you're fucking useless.”

“I'm glad you let me know,” Rebo said sarcastically, emptying the bottle before he let it slip out of his hand. “And I think you're a mindless harpy. You think you're so bloody special with your vengeance and your fury, think again, doll.”

“Like you're so fucking different.”

“I didn't say I was. We're all driven by something, love. Revenge is as good – or as bad – as anything else.” *Half full, half empty. Oldest bloody disagreement in the history of the bloody Galaxy.*

She didn't reply to that, just climbed on top of him and kissed him again, this time more intensely, and unzipped the front of her overalls. At this he decided to let both his annoyance and the exchange of insults go, emptying his mind of any disturbing thoughts that might stop him from going along with this. He *needed* this. His mind briefly formulated a scornful remark about him freezing his cock off if it came in physical contact with her, but he let it go.

“I want you to understand this completely,” she slurred, unbuttoning his shirt. “You and me. There's absolutely *nothing* between us. I'm doing this to make Jak jealous. Got it?”

“Sure.” Rebo smiled sardonically. “I can relate to that.”