

Buried Feelings

A STAR WARS audio fanfic
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Synopsis:

An aging veteran of the Clone Wars finds himself on the run, suddenly a fugitive for simply being the person he is. An impulsive decision meant to put an end to his predicament instead leads him on a path toward a new conflict, one he didn't want but somehow needed.

Disclaimer: The following story, though appropriate for general audiences, nevertheless addresses sensitive subject matter, such as depression and the contemplation of suicide. If you or a loved one are experiencing these issues, please seek help. There is always a way through, even if you can't see it.

For Marcus

From TI-12743 to TK-14057

with love

Boz Pity, Capitol City streets. Four years after the Battle of Yavin.

The hustle-and-bustle of people going about their morning routines on this world never ceased to amaze him. In fact, it routinely astonished him that there was any kind of urban environment on this planet at all. Especially after the hard campaign he and his brothers in the Grand Army of the Republic waged in order to rid this place of the Confederacy. Then came the Empire. He joined the Rebel contingent garrisoned here, code-named Renegade Squadron; Boz Pity had become his home after the Clone Wars, and home was where he intended to stay.

But, it was the Empire that ended up staying. Renegade Squadron, led by Captain Han Solo and badly outnumbered and outgunned, was able to successfully evacuate most of their people. Elpro, as he was known, was not one of them. When the time came for the Rebels to retreat off-world, Elpro refused, and removed his Rebel uniform.

"I'm not going anywhere," Elpro told Captain Solo.

Instead of charging him with desertion, Solo wished Elpro the best of luck, knowing full well what life under Imperial rule was like.

Elpro didn't have the heart to leave. He'd grown more than attached to this barely-populated ball in the Mid-Rim that was hardly more than a trading post, in the grand scheme of the galaxy. The locals, comprised mostly of settlers looking to start better lives for themselves, had also grown fond of Elpro. Although they had no clue about his clone heritage or his military background, the settlers on Boz Pity had made Elpro something of a local celebrity.

In the years following the ouster of the Confederacy of Independent Systems, Elpro's fight against the "clankers" was over, and so was his service to the Republic, as far as he was concerned. Rumor had run rampant through the ranks that the new Empire was slowly liquidating Clone Trooper assets, in favor of their own preferred brand of soldier. Elpro knew the

time to disappear was now. And in his experience, hiding in plain sight was the obvious way to go.

The locals were just like him, and he fit right in. Perhaps, he fit in too much. In a Capitol City filled with migrants and settlers looking to start life anew, things weren't easy. And yet, Elpro seemed to delight in helping others that needed it. He was always there, a middle-aged man from somewhere far away that always gave of himself, and never asked anything of anyone in return. He was well loved, perhaps more than he knew.

But good times don't last forever, and it wasn't long before the Imperial governor of the system, perhaps under pressure from a higher authority, began to clamp down on the citizenry - posting troops everywhere, enforcing martial law, and arresting anyone perceived as a threat to the new order of things. Elpro knew that if his background were discovered, he would be "liquidated" by the new Empire, just like his clone brethren.

And sure enough, his identity was uncovered. He wasn't sure how it happened, but Elpro woke one morning to Imperial stormtroopers pounding on the front door of his small, street-level apartment. Finding himself in an impending firefight while still in bed, Elpro quickly rolled onto the floor beside his bed, and reached underneath it for an old relic he'd kept on hand for just such an emergency - his old DC-15 blaster rifle. He'd lost count of how many battle droids fell to his beloved gun back in the day.

His front door blew apart, blasted open by the troopers demanding entry. There were six of them, Elpro counted. He knew now that, although he no longer wanted to fight, he didn't have a choice. He didn't want to be "liquidated." He'd rather go out in battle, which after all, is what he was created for.

"So this is it," Elpro said aloud.

Hearing him, the lead stormtrooper said, "There he is. Open fire!"

The squad of six stormtroopers with their E-11 blasters began shooting toward Elpro, who returned fire with his antiquated weapon. One trooper fell. And then another. Then, Elpro felt something hit him hard in the shoulder, followed by an intense burning sensation. The inside of his left shoulder felt like it was literally on fire. Still, laying completely prone, he continued firing. Another bolt hit him in the left thigh. Now, the entire left side of his body was in agony. Still, he continued the fight.

Before long, all six troopers were down. Despite being wounded twice and in severe pain, Elpro was alive. His attackers were not.

"Time to leave," Elpro said under his breath. He knew all along that someday this day might come. But he never really formulated an escape plan. It was clear he'd have to leave Boz Pity altogether. But where would he go? And how would he get there? It hurt just as much to think

as it did to move, but Elpro forced himself to get onto his feet. Limping and suffering from his wounds, he exited his small abode for the final time, heading for the vast jungle that bordered the city.

Boz Pity, jungle bordering Capitol City

His long-unused military training started to kick back in. Elpro did what he could to cover his tracks as he moved through the jungle, walking in circles, brushing away his footprints, and so on. All while nursing his two blaster wounds, both of which were deep and beginning to fester.

Hours went by. Elpro knew that somewhere in this jungle the wreckage of a crash-landed Republic gunship was concealed by years of floral overgrowth. Still, if he could get to the transceiver inside that downed ship, and get it working again...

The pain of his infected wounds overcame him. Elpro could no longer think clearly, and he stumbled uncontrollably as he tried to walk. He wasn't even sure what direction to walk in. The last thing Elpro realized he had a desire for was for it all to be over, especially before more Imperial troops caught up to him.

The pain racking his body was light years beyond tolerable. His mind began to fill with flashes of the few good memories his hard life had afforded him, memories he cherished: He and his fellow clones initially landing on this world, led by Jedi General Quinlan Vos. Defeating the droid armies of the Confederacy. And, perhaps his most cherished memory of all, being surrounded by people that were like him - fellow settlers on a new world that appreciated him and cared about him, and relied on him for his wisdom, advice, and his continued contributions to their small community. Elpro loved being useful here, on his new homeworld, and he loved the people that had become his friends and neighbors. He would miss them just as much as he missed his clone brothers.

A tear began to escape from the corner of Elpro's left eye, and then another one fell from his right, as he realized all the Empire had truly taken from him. He had found happiness after a life of struggle. The futility of joining the Rebellion and refusing to leave Boz Pity with the other Rebels sealed his fate. Here is where it would all end, even though he didn't want it to end like this.

Thinking that he no longer had any option left, that all was now hopeless and there was no way out of his predicament, he resigned himself to his fate. He reached for his DC-15, only to discover that he no longer had it with him. In his worsening state, as he painfully put one foot in front of the other, trying to find a crashed ship, his blaster rifle simply vanished, swallowed up by

the very jungle that had also swallowed his phantom gunship, and indeed the entire civilization that once inhabited this planet eons ago.

He fell to the ground.

On his back, Elpro writhed in both physical and mental agony. He simply could not take it anymore. He fidgeted, reaching for his belt with his good arm, trying to find something else with which to end his suffering once and for all. He didn't want this. A coward was something that he had never been; he'd faced death more times than he could count. But this was different. He wanted the life he'd finally found for himself, but he could no longer have it.

He felt something hanging on his belt, something round. The pain, along with his contorted position, prevented him from seeing it, but it felt like a thermal detonator. He didn't remember having one of those, hadn't even seen one in years. He didn't care anymore. It was something, and he tried activating it.

A single chirp, and then nothing else. No explosion. No kaboom. Nothing.

Now, there was literally nothing left. He cried out toward the sky, a yell of frustration and anger at losing control of everything. The loss of his brothers, the loss of his home and his friends. Even the loss of his mind, perhaps. He felt that he could no longer make decisions for himself, since he'd even been deprived of the ability to end his own suffering. After his scream, he exhaled what he hoped would be his last, and then lost consciousness.

The sound of thunder in the distance woke him from his sleep. It had to be sleep. Because he dreamed. He dreamed so vividly, he thought the nightmare he was now living was just that, a nightmare, and nothing more.

He was home. And more than just at home, he had taken a wife. And he had offspring. He had found happiness, at last. He also realized that he could not risk losing this, ever. The joy he felt compelled him to feel that nothing in the galaxy could take this life from him; no Empire, no war, no impulsive decision of any kind could remove this from his life now. This is what he truly longed for, and he'd found it, at last.

The thunder grew closer. The cloud cover was minimal, so it couldn't be a planetary weather pattern approaching. That could only mean one other thing. And it was approaching fast. It woke him enough that he found new energy. Enough energy, that is, to get back up to his feet before the pain returned to fully awaken him. It was then that he realized the nightmare before his dream was in fact, his current reality.

“Freeze! Don’t move,” a transmitted voice behind him said. “Turn around, slowly.”

As he struggled to do so, Elpro realized that another squad of stormtroopers found him. Why they didn’t shoot him this time was anyone’s guess. Perhaps it was to positively identify their new prisoner.

“Get it over with, trooper. I’m finished, anyway,” Elpro said.

The trooper raised his blaster. Even Imperial stormtroopers rarely missed at point blank range. Closing his eyes, Elpro awaited the inevitable shot that he could not deliver himself.

Then, the unmistakable blast came. Except, it was quite loud for an E-11. Too loud, even for a squad of stormtroopers armed with them. Opening his eyes to see if he was in fact still alive, he confirmed that he was, somewhat disappointingly. But, to his amazement, the squad of troopers before him was gone. In their place was a smoking crater, littered throughout with pieces of white plastoid armor.

The sound of thunder. It was right overhead.

Elpro strained to look up. There was a ship there, hovering, the thunderous sound of its engines filling the jungle around him. A ramp lowered to within just meters from where he was standing. A figure then walked down the ramp, toward him.

“CT-14057! Give me your hand and get on board. Hurry, we don’t have much time!”

Elpro did as he was ordered. The voice that issued the order for him to get aboard sounded very much like his, and he reacted instinctively. It was ingrained within him to follow that voice.

On the boarding ramp, Elpro fell once again, the energy all but gone from his body this time. He started to pass out again, but not before recognizing the familiar voice, and the silhouette that stood before him, as a 21B medical droid began to tend to his wounds.

“You’re a clone,” Elpro said, as he started to fade into unconsciousness once more.

“That’s right. You can call me Rex. We picked up the GAR distress signal you sent, just in the nick of time. I haven’t heard that thing used in so long, I just knew one of my brothers was in danger. We’re taking you somewhere safe, now.”

The ship exited hyperspace, joining a fleet of ships that had gathered near the Sullest system. It was a massive fleet; more and more ships seemed to be joining them by the hour. As he looked out his medbay window, Elpro could make out what appeared to be Mon Calamari cruisers, and Correlian Corvettes, among other vessels he didn't recognize.

"You should stay off of your feet for a few more days," the 21B droid looking after him stated.

"Whatever you say, doc," Elpro responded. "Where am I, anyway?"

"I'll let him explain that," the droid replied, motioning toward a small group of rebel soldiers that had just walked in, two of whom Elpro recognized.

"So, we meet again. I wished you good luck, before. Looks like it did you some good," Han Solo said.

"I guess you're right, sir. Thank you for coming after me, Captain Solo," Elpro said, now relieved that things hadn't ended so badly for him on Boz Pity after all.

"It's General Solo now. And don't look at me, it was all this guy," said Solo, motioning toward a familiar figure standing next to him.

The man was about the same age as Elpro, and heavily bearded, whereas Elpro was always clean-shaven. Still, there was no denying the face under all of that facial hair. It was his own face.

"Rex," Elpro said under his breath, in a loud whisper.

"We're getting ready to embark on a mission that will hit the Empire harder than they've ever been hit before. It will be just like old times. Are you in?" Rex asked.

Elpro, who just a short while ago was in a jungle, in mental and physical anguish, begging for his life to be taken, now said readily, "You bet. Count me in."

Sullest system, forest moon of Endor

The landing force he was part of wasn't a large one, but it was enough of a raid to cause a big enough distraction for the Rebel fleet to carry out their mission against the battle station in orbit above, and its accompanying Star Destroyers.

Infiltrate the enemy, and take out the generator. Just like old times.

The small team had a few ensembles of captured enemy armor with them. After scouting the location of the shield generator, the rebel band decided that the enemy garrison stationed here on Endor was too large for a direct assault. Infiltration and sabotage was definitely key to this operation, as had been the plan all along. Rex and Elpro donned their stolen stormtrooper armor.

“TK-14057. Has a nice ring to it,” Elpro said, recalling his old Clone identification number. “Still, I prefer having a name, not just a number. That’s a privilege we Clone Troopers had that these Imperial troops will never get.”

“I know what you mean,” Rex said. “How did you come to choose the name ‘Elpro,’ anyway?”

“It’s an acronym,” Elpro replied. “In the Legion I was attached to, under General Vos, I was - “

His words were cut short by the arrival of an Imperial Scout Walker, its canons fixated on his position, and flanked by dozens of Stormtroopers.

Once again, Elpro thought the end was inevitable. Yet, while the Imperial troopers were rounding up his Rebel unit and leading them toward the bunker entrance that led to the Death Star shield generator, Elpro thought he could hear some type of horn being sounded, somewhere in the distance. And then, native reinforcements emerged from concealed positions, giving the Rebels the fighting chance they needed to attack the shield generator.

Amid the chaos around him, Elpro realized something he never took the time to consider. As he reached for the E-11 blaster rifle of a fallen Stormtrooper nearby and then scrambled for cover, General Solo turned to Elpro, displaying a trademark grin on his face that he’d become known for.

“Never turn down help when you know you might need it,” Solo said, as he took a shot at an Imperial Officer nearby. Elpro did the same with his newfound weapon. As he did so, he remembered inadvertently calling for help, when he thought for sure he was arming a thermal detonator to end his life with.

“If there’s one thing I’ve learned lately, it’s that help is always within reach. Even if it doesn’t seem like it is. I won’t forget it,” Elpro said, as he took up a position near Rex. Two old clones, fighting the good fight, one final time.

THE END