

Of Good and Evil

G'lishi sought out Private 1st Class Anthony Riley of the Recon Squad. The black man was sitting in the doorway of his Uktena robot with a PDD player in his hands. He waved as the young dragon approached and then pulled the ear buds out and put the unit behind him. No one else was around. Certain that it was safe to talk G'lishi asked, "P.1C. Riley, I have a confusing question I hope you can answer. All my life I have been told that the Coalition is evil and that is justification for killing them. Recently I have figured out that some people on our side are also evil. Why do we not kill them? Are there different types of evil? Is evil okay if you know them but not if you don't? Can we even be certain that all the Coalition soldiers are evil? I mean, if some of us are not good, then maybe some of them are not evil."

Riley had a strange expression on his face that changed but never became clear as G'lishi asked his string of questions. Finally he gave his head a shake and carefully said, "This war is a mess. Plain and simple, a mess. You're right to ask these questions."

He paused a moment then continued, "There is no doubt in my mind that the Coalition's war against us is evil. They intend to march into our lands, kill our people, and destroy our cities. That's reason enough for us to act. We must defend ourselves."

"I can't really say how many of the Coalition soldiers are evil. The thing about a real military is that you do what you are told. They say fight these people. You fight them. They say protect these people. You protect them. A soldier can only hope that he is doing the right thing until he knows his right and wrong. Many of the Coalition soldiers believe they're making the world a safer place for themselves, their families, and the people around them. It's not true, but that is what some think. Those would be good people. They're still dangerous to us, though.

"Then there are Coalition soldiers who don't care as long as they can kill people. That's all they want. They know that we mean them no harm, but they go along with the war anyway. They join the army in great numbers and stay with it as long as they can. They want to be in the Coalition army. I've heard things when some people in Markeen talked before the war. They said that some people have no choice but to join the Coalition army. They have to do it so they can have a home for their wives and their children, or to get them better, cleaner, safer homes. They are the ones I feel really sorry for. It must just make them sick having to kill a bunch of people they've never met before, don't know anything about, probably never have even seen if they didn't have to go to war to see their own loved ones protected. So... I guess that covers the part about the Coalition.

"Anyways, I guess I shouldn't be surprised that there

are evil people in our own troops. War brings them out everywhere. It's a sad fact. It's also sad that I think we need them. In some ways it might be better. Sometimes, G'lishi, good people have to do evil things. It's never a good thing to kill another intelligent being. It may be necessary, like to save your life, or save someone else's life, but that doesn't make it good. Sometimes we have to stain our souls for our lives. It's easy for an evil person to join a war effort, but it takes a brave and driven man to damn himself for it. To damn himself for others. To do wrong for the right reason. That's why everyone doesn't fight. And why they shouldn't have to fight. Some of us have to take the burden for them. We save them even more than we could ever save ourselves."

G'lishi was quiet throughout Riley's talk. Much of it didn't make sense, but then G'lishi was used to the world not making sense. He had a few conflicting notions, such as: kill anyone to save someone else; good has to be evil to fight evil; good fights good because both became evil; evil fighting evil means one of the evils might be good; good fights evil, but it needs evil sometimes; good should not fight at all, but it has to. Most of all, though he did not articulate the thought, he was trying to understand the concept of necessary evil.

There were also things that are clear to him: kill all Coalition troops, even good ones; kill anyone to save your own life; in the military, follow orders; protect good from evil.

When Riley asked "So, who exactly is evil in our two groups?"

G'lishi hesitated, trying to work through what was wrong and right. Finally, he said, slowly, trying to put it together as he went, "We are in the military. So we follow orders. Part of orders is not to say bad things about superior officers. So I should not tell you who is evil. Plus, we need them, and we need to work as a team with them, so it's better if no one knows. Even me. So I should try to forget."

Focusing on Riley, G'lishi asked, "How do I forget something? I do it sometimes by accident, but how do I do it on purpose?"

Throughout his speech Riley had been almost impassioned in parts, particularly near the end. For his question he had shifted gears rather quickly turning it to a more conversational tone. Now, for G'lishi's question his tone was more subdued, and heavy. The cracked quality of his voice and the way it seemed to splinter on some words worsened. He said, "I'm not a good one to ask that. I can't forget anything that I'd like to forget." (I won't forget there is evil among us.)

Csryfed stood behind the tree cloaked in his Naruni camo-sheet listening to his Private and the baby dragon from the General's group talk about good and evil. He ran his hand down over his long trunk-like nose as a man might stroke his chin while in thought. He ceased doing it when Riley slyly asked to know who the evil people

were. His breath held caught in his throat as he waited for the answer. The dragon took his time answering and Csryfed sighed quietly when the creature declined to answer.

Csryfed backed away slowly, carefully placing his three-toed feet to avoid as much noise as possible. After proceeding that way for a while he turned and disappeared into the woods.