

“The House that Hungered”

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“Fascinating.” A blue skinned Duros holding a datapad remarked as he crossed the threshold into the entryway.

The entryway, more accurately described as a foyer, was part of a lonely house in the oldest part of Port Ol’val. The doors and wall panels were painstakingly carved and finished from fine lumber. Great care was taken and no expense was apparently spared in the recreation of the mansion’s style and architecture reminiscent of the ancient halls of Muunhilit. Yet, the character of the house had a more sinister feel to it than simply replicating the mansions of long dead Muun tycoons.

The Duros stopped to examine a rustic wooden timepiece just inside the foyer when a small squad of five mercenaries in matching blue and white armor came crashing into the room behind him. A blue skinned Twi’lek female and a lion-like Cathar male rushed past the Duros and took up positions on the right and left side of the archway leading to a large grand staircase room.

“Secure!” Growled the Cathar.

Two Human males took up similar positions at either side of the door the group just passed through. One of the males was a hulking bear of a man with blonde hair cut in a short military style. The other Human male had messy raven hair and couldn’t have been more than 19 years old; an onlooker would have inquired as to whether he needed a permission slip before joining a merc outfit.

“Entrance secure!” Exclaimed the bulkier Human, deliberately mimicking the growling tone of the Cathar. The Cathar rolled his eyes and returned to scanning his side of the room ahead.

A maroon skinned male Devoroninan in the blue and white armor calmly approached the distracted Duros. “I hate to interrupt what I’m sure is a fascinating study Doctor Rahab, but we have a mission here. You were hired to help secure an artifact.”

Rahab quit staring at the low tech clock and stood up. “Right, right, according to historical records Madame de’Lovecraft installed a vault in the basement of the house prior to her passing, that is where the artifact is likely kept.”

The Devoroninan nodded with understanding, “Just get us to the vault, there isn’t a safe in the galaxy that Vara here can’t crack.”

The Twi’lek female smiled with pride. “You’re too kind Mel.”

“Just do your part, this Sith trinket will fetch a hefty price on the black market and I don’t have to tell you what a bounty like that would mean, both for our own pocketbooks and the Blue Suns.” The armored mercenaries nodded in unison. “Doctor if you please.”

The Duros pointed to the far side of the next room. "The entrance to the basement should be past the grand staircase room, through the hallway and at the rear of the ground floor." He hesitated for a moment, "Just be careful not to touch anything, Madame de'Lovecraft was rather paranoid in her old age and likely has traps throughout the house."

Mel rubbed his broken right horn absent mindedly, "Well you heard the Professor, move out!"

Just as the two humans covering the front door got up to shift into the grand staircase room, the front doors slammed shut behind them with a loud THUD. The two mercenaries turned to their rear in confusion as neither had shut the door. The larger of the two brushed the younger aside and began to try to force the door open.

"It won't open."

The Cathar laughed, "Well maybe if you spent more time training and less time reading trashy holonovels Karn, you'd be able to open a simple door.

The gruffer looking Human was not amused, "Stuff it Garruk!"

Rahab moved behind Karn to examine the door as the large Human pulled on the handle to no avail. "Curious, it's a trap of some kind."

The Devoroninan squad leader inquired, "Why would a trap lock someone inside the house, wouldn't it make more sense to keep people out?"

"A mystery indeed."

A loud series of clicks was heard below the door followed by a soft hum outside the door. Whatever had been holding the front door shut released and the door flew open toward the inside of the foyer sending Karn flying backwards into his younger Human counterpart. "Get off me!"

A yellow translucent field now existed on the other side of the front door. The Duros and Devoronian studied the field for a moment. "Doctor, what are we looking at?"

Karn disentangled himself from his companion and stood up. "A kriffin' ray shield."

"Not quite my well armed friend, give a moment to ascertain what kind of trap this is."

The hulking Human walked up to the field, "It's pretty obvious what it is." He absently struck the field with the back of his fist. The field reacted with a high pitch resonance that caused

everyone in the room to cover their ears and Karn to cry out and slump to the ground with blood emanating from his nose and ears.

“KARN!” The younger human cried as he rushed to his comrade’s side.

Mel stood up and helped Rahab to his feet. “Jace, get him away from that field! We don’t even know what it is.”

“On it boss!” Jace acknowledged as he drug Karn further into the house. Vara and Garruk moved into the grand staircase room and took up a position between twin spiraling staircases underneath a giant chandelier.

The armored Devoronian and civilian Duros stood in the foyer, a safe distance from the field, as they assessed the situation. “Well Doc, I don’t think we’re getting out the way we came.” Mel turned to check on his man.

“It’s some kind of resonance field, like the kind the ancient Sith would use to capture Jedi prisoners.” Rahab shook his head and rejoined the rest of the group in the grand staircase room.

The grand staircase room was dimly lit by the soft glow of the chandelier, cobwebs and dust covered everything in sight. The air was stale and chilled, like the filtration system was on the fritz or something. The air in the room shifted in and out of the hallways in a rhythmic pattern, almost as if the house itself was breathing. It made the hair on one’s neck stand up.

Mel knelt down next to Jace who was treating his comrade. “How is he?”

“He’s stable, but out cold for now. Whatever that field is, it packs a punch on organics.”

“Duly noted.”

Garruk growled from his post at the mouth of the connecting hallway. “Hey boss I think someone is down there.” A non-descript shadow darted from one side of the hallway to the other. “STOP or we’ll open fire!” Only the faint sound of feminine laughter could be heard in response, though it seemed to be coming from multiple directions at once.

Mel looked around the room confused, “What in the verse was that?”

The armored mercenaries exchanged concerned looks before returning to their respective tasks at hand. The Duros professor seemed strangely unphased by the entire situation as he continued to study his surroundings. Jace began waving his hand excitedly as his companion came to.

“Hey, I think Karn is waking up. You still with us big guy?”

The Human sat up slowly and rubbed his forehead. “Uhh, technically. Did someone get the number of the cargo ship that hit me?”

“Garruk get him on his feet, we need to move on. Jace, take Garruk’s place.” The Devoronian ordered while readying his own weapon. The mercs moved without saying a word. The Cathar helped the larger Human to his feet and let him lean on his shoulder.

“Why fuzzball, I didn’t know you cared.”

Garruk bore his fangs in a toothy grin, “I may need a snack later and you’ve got more meat on you than that scrawny kid.”

“Cut the chatter, let’s move out.”

The group set out down the ground floor hallway with Jace and Vara taking point followed by Doctor Rahab in the middle, Garruk and Karn behind him and Mel bringing up the rear. As they progressed down the hall the ambient lighting became dimmer and dimmer forcing the mercs to pause and attach lights to their rifles. Finally the group came to a T intersection with the choice of going left or right.

“Which way Doc?”

The Duros paused for a moment to examine his datapad. “I am unsure.”

Mel wasted no time giving direction. “We’ll have to split up, Vara and Jace will go with me and the Doc will go with Garruk and Karn.”

The Professor offered protest, “I do not think that is such a good idea.”

“There’s no time, we have our comm links and another gang may have beaten us in here. If you find anything or see anyone stop and call for backup.”

The two groups split up with Mel’s group going right and the Professor’s group going left. Mel’s group followed the hallway on the right until it forced a 90 degree turn to the left such that the T intersection they came from was no longer visible. Further inside the house the hallways were lit only with small lights on either side of the floor, similar to emergency exit lighting on a starship. The hallway was lined with alcoves on either side containing statues of various dead Sith lords.

Vara paused to examine one of the statues, “This place gives me the creeps. What are we looking for anyway?”

“A way into the basement, now stay focused.”

“But this statue is so, so life like” The Twi’lek reached out to touch it, before anyone could react the statue and the floor around it fell straight down like a trap door. Vara was caught in the opening and fell straight into a black abyss. Once the armored Twi’lek had passed through the trap, the statue and floor sprung back into place like nothing had happened.

“VARA!” Jace scream as he rush to where the trap door had been before Mel clotheslined him.

“Stay back you idiot! Don’t trigger it again.” Mel keyed up his comm unit. “Vara, do you read? Are you alright?”

Vara’s responded, but not through the comm unit. “Mel? Jace? Where are you? It’s dark and cold in here. I think I broke something.” Her voice seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere at once.

Jace stood back up. “Just hang in there Vara, we’re coming to get you. Just stay put.”

“I’m scared Jace.” Her voice emanated from the walls.

Mel stood off to the side trying to raise the other team on his comm link but got only static. Jace paced impatiently around the edge of the trap door, trying to examine it. Confident he moved up to the statue and touched it. Nothing happened. He hopped up and down in frustration on the floor and the trap did not budge.

“Stop jumping, it’s obvious the trap door won’t open again.”

“So what do we do boss? We can’t just leave her down there!” The young human’s eyes nearly began to tear up in exasperation, he clearly harbored intense feelings for the Twi’lek.

“The trap door probably leads into the basement, we just need to keep going and find the others. The Professor will know how to find her. But you need to stay focused.”

Mel and Jace marked the statue’s location with a glow stick and moved on. As they came to another corner they paused at the sound of distant footsteps. Mel gave the hand signal for Jace to form up behind him as the footsteps came closer. As the sound increased in volume they could distinguish a mechanical creaking sound with the footsteps.

A decrepit, dusty protocol droid lumbered around the corner to find two guns pointed at it. The droid wore a torn dress and was clearly built with feminine features. One of its optical receivers dangled out of its socket. “Oh my. You seem to be lost.” The droid twitched and spasmed for a moment as each word seemed to be a struggle.

“Identify yourself!” Mel demanded.

“My name is...” The feminine droid twitched some more as its voice modulator malfunctioned and changed pitch and tone drastically. “Lenore.”

Jace continued to point his blaster at the droid’s face. “That’s an odd name for a protocol droid.”

Mel raised a hand for Jace to stand down. “Have you seen anyone else in here, anyone wearing the same armor as us.” The droid tilted its head for a moment then shook it no. “Okay, do you know how to get to basement?”

The droid spasmed violently, “No no no no no, mustn’t go to the basement.” The droid’s voice deepened significantly as it increased in clarity. “There are bad things in the basement, old things, evil things.”

“I need to get down there, I think one of my team is down there.”

“She is lost, never to be found again, swallowed by the bl-bl-bl-blackness”

Jace shoved his rifle into the droid’s face, “You don’t know what you’re talking about you stupid hunk of junk!”

Mel batted Jace’s rifle away, “Stand down soldier! You’re letting your emotions get in the way.” He turned to droid, “You need to help us.”

While Mel was addressing the droid, a faint voice emanated from behind them. “Jaaaace, It’s cold here. I want to go home.”

“That’s Vara!” Jace turned and took off toward the direction of the voice. He thought he saw his Twi’lek companion off in the distance, which made him run even faster.

“Come back here you kriffin’ moron!” Mel turned to try to stop Jace. Where Jace saw Vara in the distance, Mel saw a shadowy figure standing at the end of the hallway. “What the...Jace! That’s not her! Come back!” His warning fell on deaf ears.

Vara’s voice continued from the far end of the hall where the figure stood. “Just a little further, I think I can see you. We can leave this place. We can be together, just like you always wanted.”

Tears were now rolling down the young man’s face as he ran. He dropped his rifle, his mind only on what he thought lie ahead. “I’m coming for you Vara!” Those would be his last words. Just before he reached the figure, the floor dropped out from under him in a trap door. Mel

rushed to the edge of the trap door and heard a gurgling sound coming from inside. When he got to the edge he saw a pit of large metal spikes with Jace impaled right through the chest on one of them, his arm outstretched and blood coming from his mouth. Mel fell to his knees at the edge of the pit.

“Damn it Jace! Why didn’t you listen?”

The droid slowly sauntered up to Mel. “He is part of the shadow now.”

Mel slowly stood up, staring into the pit. “What do you mean? Where is this shadow? Can you take me to it?”

Lenore stood behind Mel as he mourned his comrade, unable to take his eyes from the young man’s corpse. “I I I I I will show you.”

“Huh?”

With a quick shove, Mel joined Jace in the pit.

The Duros wiped blood droplets from his face as he knelt before a glowing cube hover over an altar. Beside him a Human and Cathar lay face down on the floor, both their heads bludgeoned in, blood pooling near the base of the altar.

“I have brought you more sacrifices master, do they please you?” He nodded silently for a moments as if someone were speaking to him. “I will do as you ask master, I will find those who touch the Force to feed your hunger.” He stood up and left the chamber, off to find more greedy souls who sought the power of the artifact.