

The jungle was dark tonight.

Boral hung low overhead, the silvery white moon cut in half like a knife by Selen's shadow. The sickly moonlight cast itself across the trees like a cloud of dust, painting the mountainside in its ghostly pale glow. The wind blew in great bursts and gusts that sent the trees to shake, and the bushes to shuddering, its percussive beat holding them enraptured like tiny savages dancing across the landscape.

A storm loomed, across the blackened sea.

Unnoticed and unremarked by the growing congregation, something stalked through the branches below. A lone cloaked figure, trailed closely by a floating probe droid, cut his way through the thick foliage, marching up the mountain. He stumbled as the wind rocked the island, pulling his cloak closer to keep the chill from his bones. He leaned against the nearest tree, his breathing labored, and his orange eyes bloodshot with fatigue.

He had not been sleeping well.

The droid behind beeped with concern, its scarlet eye glowing bright, which elicited a hiss as the figure pushed himself back up to a standing position.

"I'm fine, droid. We can't stop now," the hisses and growls of his native tongue echoed in the night air, a foreign tongue to this primeval wilderness. Never before had a Trandoshan like Grot journeyed here, to this remote land, rarely visited even by Selen's natives.

"I can't stop now," He whispered to himself, continuing his pilgrimage up the mountain.

His head swam with exhaustion, his vision blurred, he felt nauseous and sick. He raises his vibrosword weakly, cutting away last few vines the blocked passage into a clearing where the forest thinned. From here, so close to the mountaintop, the entire island was visible. High above the star gazed down with brightly shining eyes.

"Wood," Grot choked, collapsing to his knees, "I need wood, dry wood." The droid beeped and rushed into the woods to obey his master. The Trandoshan kneeled in the dirt, leaning with one arm against his vibrosword. He turned and flexed the other arm, the sickly, crippled limb responding only feebly.

I should have given it more time this wasn't enough it's a bad idea I'm not strong enough I can't do this I'm just being weak and cowardly the screaming crying charging shouting at

the top of their lungs with knives like burning flame kids and men and elders fanatics charging through the smoke and fire fire fire shoot before they get too close they're here they're here fighting chopping crying slashing here it comes here it comes the pain the pain the pain like a thousand little needles digging burning slashing black the night that never ends

Grot screamed aloud, a hoarse and pitiful shout as he banished the thoughts circling like vultures in his head. He could not let them in now. They would tempt him to failure, they would try his resolve.

He would not give in.

The droid came bursting through the bushes, eye burning bright as it scanned the clearing. Seeing no threat it rushed to its master, beeping in concern once more. Grot brushed him off with another hiss and rose back up to his feet.

“Did you find the wood,” Grot asked weakly. The droid hesitated, hovering in place for a split second, before leading his master into the tree-line. Just beyond the clearing, a tree lay felled some time ago by lightning. The corpse of the once living tree now rotting and riddled with fungus, but perfectly usable as firewood.

“Good, Droid” Grot knelt down, bringing his vibrosword up to hack away at the fallen tree, the ultrasonically vibrating blade making short work of the soft wood.

High above the sky flashed with lightning, and the thunder shook the firmament with its anger.

Dessicated and dried like fruit upon the forest floor dozens of little pods across the desert a soldier one and all lost scattered tossed away unthinking honorless commanders and left to die choked with dust burnt and brittle still gripping his canteen for one last sip

Grot shook his head and ignored the bitter memories which plagued him. He would be purged of these demons soon, at last, he would rest. He was sure of it, he had to be sure of it.

He had to believe.

He took off his cloak, braving the cold so he could use it as a sled for the wood. With his one good arm he dragged it back to the clearing, gasping with exhaustion. He stacked the wood carefully, piece by piece, into an altar in the center of the clearing.

**Buildings broken torn destroyed tossed over like toys fountains statues roads and homes
beaten blown booming guns and roaring ships blasters bright bang the big guns roar and
shout lobbying shell after shell after shell flying screaming tearing down from the sky
striking killing stealing murdering no warning no mercy no restraint**

Grot knelt before the altar, his work complete, and gestured for the droid to come beside him. Unable to process what was happening, the droid obeyed, coming to a rest on the ground beside its master as he reached into his coat with his withered arm. A durasteel medallion glinted in the pale moonlight glinted beside a red matchbox. With trembling claws, he set both on the altar and drew a match from the box

His arms almost too weak, he lit the match and set the bottom of the altar alight

Slowly, reverently, he reached down to his sword and cut open his good palm, letting the blood flow freely. He cupped his claw to catch it, and reached up to the altar, slowly pouring the blood onto the locket, dripping down to the flames below. It boiled and burned, the stench and smoke filling the air as Grot slowly closed his eyes

**Blood bone bodies too bruised cut smashed sliced little pieces everywhere goddess the smell
they never talk about the smell dozens hundreds thousands dead stacked and piled ditches
trenches row on row of blag choking screaming suffocating body bags**

“Goddess...” he licked his lips, suddenly unsure of himself. He had come so far, he realized that he didn’t know what to say. He growled and hissed beginning again “Goddess, I come to you as Grot, son of Gron, son of Trandosha. I... I do not pray as often as I should. I have not come to you in a long time, but, I beg you for your answer!”

Grot clenched his bloody fist, feeling the flames rise higher.

“I am lost, oh Goddess! I have lost the way of the hunter and wander through a wilderness of despair. I have seen so much death, so much pointless blood spilled without honor or thought... I have spilled so much blood. Worthless, pointless, weak! How can this be your path! That so many should enter the hereafter and be condemned to eternal nothingness! I have gained, Jugganath points for the boys and men I killed, and they had earned none to be their prize!” Grot gritted his teeth, feeling the flames begin to lick his hand as he struggled through his prayer.

“How desolate, how cruel your mandates! I cannot see the path anymore, I cannot call myself a hunter. I beg of you, guide me!” He shouted now, the flames licking his palm and burning his hand. His droid cried out in alarm, but he ignored it.

“Please, give me a sign! Banish these demons from my mind! The smell of burning flesh choked the clearing as Grot fell into wrenching sobs. The sky cracked and roiled with furious energy, and the trees circled ever closer in their frenzied, pulsating dance.

And then quiet.

Grot felt the pain flee, the droids frenzied beeps disappeared into the ether, and the wind died as the world snapped into focus. A crackling of branches like breaking bones came from the tree-line behind him. Slowly, he got to his feet and turned to look.

There stalking along the tree-line, sleek and black as the void, something moved. It stalked across his vision, the yellow reflection of its eyes shining in the darkness. He leaned down and grabbed his sword, palm stinging sharply and he crouched and regarded the beast.

He did not want to die here. He did not want to go like all the others into the black, screaming nothing that awaited the honorless. He would fight, he would fight!

And that was enough.

As the beast locked eyes with his, he saw. It was not the kill, but the fight which mattered. So long as you fought, there were points for you to have. An afterlife awaited all those who did not go quietly into the black. Those boys, those soldiers fought. He would fight.

The goddess had shown him the Way.

The beast seemed almost to sign, it shook its great bulk and turned back towards the forest, retreating into the jungle as Grot collapsed, his endurance well and truly spent. In his last moments of consciousness he reached out towards his droid, croaking one last order for his loyal servant.

“Get... help...”

And it began to rain.

