

They Come In the Night

-A Continuous Assault Story-

Vodo Biask Taldrya - 3729

Goros was a backwoods planet in the Outer-Rim. With twin suns daylight sometimes came twice in a single day and the hours of daylight varied from day to day. It was hard to set a clock by the hours of daylight because high noon, with both of the yellow stars high overhead, might be the dead of night the next day. Because Goros orbited both stars and not just one the hours of daylight varied by time of year as well when one star seemed to eclipse the other and only one sun in the sky provided illumination. The flora and fauna of the erratic world was well adjusted, hardy, and took little notice.

For the Soldiers of the Liberation Front it was a different story. Humanoid beings with diurnal rhythms found the march of time trying. Several fighters had suffered mental breakdowns and had been shot for Cowards by the officers in-charge, an example to anyone who thought they might get out of duty by complaining they couldn't sleep. Truth was, no one was sleeping well. Morale was not good and most beings spent their time kicking the dirt in small circles grumbling where none of the commanding Officers could hear. Grumbling was considered mutinous and punishable by the harshest means possible.

If it had not been for the fact that the beings here were ideologues, fighters motivated by their fervent beliefs, there would have long ago been a mutiny. The reason they were here on this sun blasted planet, with its hardy ground-level thorn plants and rodent burrows was a mystery to all but the officers and only the highest ranking among them. They were near to Brotherhood space, they knew, but what the particular importance of this planet was anyone's guess. Even zealots needed reassurance and in the absence of it they grew disgruntled and impatient.

Florin Gessup shifted his service rifle in his grip as he stood around with two of his squadmates. Huret and Serin were some of the most profuse grumblers but they hadn't been caught yet.

"...and you know what the worst part is?" Serin flicked Huret's armored shoulder, "We're nearly out of rations. Way I heard it, we have three more weeks and after that its boiled vac-suits and roast Rodian for us."

Florin watched an officer, one of those blue-skinned bug-eyed aliens, who looked as though he would pass within hearing range, "Don't even joke about that."

Serin followed Florin's eyes and grew quiet. The three of them watched the man approach and as he came within a few paces they dutifully, if not with some visible resignation, rendered the required greeting, "Good morning, Sir."

The peevish man looked down his proboscis at them without stopping, <<Good morning. I imagine there's something more productive you three could be about.>>

"Yes Sir", Huret replied, his voice only barely concealing his sarcasm, "Come on boys, let's go be productive."

Florin leaned over towards Serin as they walked in the opposite direction to find somewhere else they could stand around, "Way I heard it, the Quartermasters are expecting a long-overdue resupply this evening. We aren't going to go hungry."

Serin chuckled, "You're an optimist, kid. That's a problem we're going to work on or you'll get yourself, or all of us, killed."

It turned out there would be no more standing around that day. They were soon gathered into a work party by their Team Leader, a Lieutenant by the name of Coreen. With shovels and tools in hand they were set to digging, a task not uncommon here on Goros to the beings of the Liberation Front. They dug trenches, they dug holes, and they dug tunnels. It was as though a great, pitched battle was anticipated to take place here. When, and if, it did they would be supremely well prepared for a traditional ground assault. Florin wasn't sure how they were to force the Brotherhood into one of those without Anti-Aircraft weaponry and no orbital fleet. That was something the Officers had the answers for, not foot soldiers like him.

"When the resupply mission gets here, I can't wait to get my hands on the Cheesesteak", Florin muttered.

They all had their favorite flavors of prepared ration packets. They were all made of the same nutrient packed soylent bricks but some varieties were vastly superior to others and Huret agreed, "Cheesesteak for me too. I traded my last one for a multitool last time and I regret it everyday."

"Poor trade", Serin murmured, "But it's Spiced Bantha for me."

"I thought you didn't think there'd be a resupply", Florin chided his squaddie.

Serin grunted as he pried a stone from the dry soil and hefted it over the edge of the trench, "I can dream, can't I?"

They worked through the daylight until the suns fell over the line of the horizon and weren't expected to return for close to six hours. As usual everyone took this opportunity to catch as

much sleep as could be had. Sentries were posted on lookout, for some reason, and the rest curled up in place and closed their eyes. Florin was lucky and had been selected to keep watch for any approaching enemies, as if one could approach the planet without alerting them, land a force and engage them in secrecy. He hadn't ever been in a real army but he knew something about how battles were fought at this point.

The braying of repulsors reached his ears as a shuttle descended from orbit. The sparkle of its navigational lights let him follow its flight path through the dark of the mid-day night until they settled behind their encampment relative to his point of view.

Florin kicked Serin's shoulder with his boot, "Hey, wake up."

"The frak is wrong with you? I'm not on sentry duty yet", Serin rolled over.

"It's not that", Florin crouched over Serin and pointed, "The shuttle is here. Optimists: 1, you: 0."

Serin sat up quickly and got to his feet, "It's here? Great, I'm going to go grab chow."

Huret coughed meaningfully, a man of few words and Serin picked up his meaning, "For us all, of course."

Serin jogged off leaving Huret, who closed his eyes again, and Florin in the Trench. Other Liberation Front Soldiers to their left and right were similarly sending a man or two off. They'd soon return with fresh rations and, for a few minutes at least, morale would come up a bit. That hope was dashed when an enormous explosion rocked the air. A massive orange and yellow plume of fire lit the sky, originating from the ground behind the camp relative to where Florin stood watch. Where the shuttle had landed.

"Are we under attack?" someone down the line said.

Florin gripped his weapon, "You all stay here, I'll go find out what we're supposed to do. Huret, come with me."

Together they jogged back into the camp and found it in chaos as people raced to and fro. Like them other soldiers of the Front wandered around looking for answers. They quickly ascertained that there was no single answer, just that the Shuttle had landed and shortly thereafter exploded. At least one officer ran through the camp calling for the men to take up their weapons, that they were under attack but no one really took him seriously-- there'd been no warning of a fleet in orbit, no landing of a force great enough to threaten them, and no indication at all the Brotherhood was at all aware of their existence on this no-where planet.

Huret and Florin approached the burning wreckage of the shuttle where an effort was underway to put out the flames. Even twenty-five meters away the heat was intense and they dared not

come any closer. Around them campaign tents and the prefabricated containers used to set up officers quarters and work spaces had been flattened. Under more than one of them Florin could see evidence that the occupants were still in there. Patting Huret on the shoulder to get his attention he indicated they should start sifting through the wreckage to see if anyone was still alive.

Together they pulled a large sheet of reinforced plas from one pile to find the body of a Company Commander beneath, impaled with a shard of the very same plas. He was dead. They dragged the body out and laid it out for later retrieval and set to work moving more debris. Back towards shuttle the air was filled with the sound of a distinct voice which silenced all others.

“Quicktime you malingerers! Put out that bloody fire or it’ll be you burning next! Now, I said, now!”

“Great. There’s the Colonel”, Huret’s shoulders hunched.

Colonel Therrence was despised universally in the Battalion. If it weren’t for the planet Goros’s miserable day/night cycle and their horrendous work hours morale would still have been in the pits if only because of Colonel “Do or Die” Therrence. He did little to engender any feelings of loyalty amongst his men and ruled with an iron fist. He treated the Officers marginally better but punished them twice as hard so not a single one of his subordinates was anything less than steadfast in their duty of making the rank and file’s life that much worse. It all made Florin question whether the cause was worth all this.

The Colonel marched about pointing to men and soldiers directing them to specific tasks as if they were unable to make those decisions themselves. When he came to Florin and Huret he pointed a knife hand in their direction, “You two, I want this mess cleaned up. Report any bodies you find and get aid to any still living. Hop to it.”

Florin was halfway through rendering a salute when a blue blaster bolt burned through the man’s temple. Stunned he stood there with his arm half-raised and tried to make sense of what he’d just seen. The Colonel’s body collapsed to the ground and lay there motionlessly. There’d been no screech of a rifle discharge and only the nearest few had seen what had happened and all were similarly shocked into momentary stillness as the rest of the camp continued in its chaos.

“What the frak?” Huret whispered.

A nearby soldier from Besh Company asked, “Did someone’s weapon go off?”

Florin's stomach dropped as he feared for a split second that his weapon had negligently discharged, killing the Commander. The fate of traitors was well known. He got ahold of his anxiety though when logic kicked in.

"No, our weapons fire green bolts... Oh, fierfek!", he yelled and grabbed Huret, "We're under attack!"

"What?" Huret could be slow but it quickly dawned on him, "Sithspit, we have to raise the alarm!"

"Wait!" Florin reached out for Huret as he took off running but a bolt of blue energy caught him in the back and he fell to the ground, skidding to a stop on his face motionlessly.

Everyone who had seen took cover at this and the cry went up their they were under attack. The cry seemed to be the signal the enemy was waiting for and blue bolts began erupting from all directions, crashing into bodies left and right. Men of the Liberation Front dived for cover but it was hard to tell what direction the enemy was firing from, what would protect you and what wouldn't. Florin low-crawled to Huret and shook him by the shoulder but his battle buddy didn't move.

The dirt kicked up all around him from shots hitting the ground and he continued crawling towards a pile of crates. Blaster rounds thudded into the side of the pile with dull thwacks, thundering in time with his racing heartbeat. He realized his world had grown very small for a moment and as he expanded his awareness he could hear the shouting and screaming of men all over the camp. He could hear the discharge of blaster rifles and the thwump of exploding detonators all around him. The camp wasn't large, only about 100m a side so even the most distant explosions sounded terribly close and frightened him. In the confusion someone could toss a thermal detonator in his direction not realizing he was there. He had to move and find a cohesive group.

He prepared himself and then sprinted a short distance to another pile of supplies, this time enemy fire did not follow him. Wherever they were, they were distracted with shooting at another target. Florin continued like that, racing from cover to cover, sometimes dodging errant bolts of cyan energy and other times emerald as his own-side mistook him for a possible adversary. Though he came across bodies and saw his comrades fall prey to enemy fire he never saw the enemy himself. Was this the Brotherhood? How many men had they managed to sneak onto the planet to assault this Battalion of five hundred men?

Florin hit the dirt, flung to the ground by an explosion behind him. He scrambled on hands and knees into an alley created by two of the prefab structures still standing. He crawled backwards, his blaster held in one hand covering the entrance to the alley he'd just come through. Against the growing pink of a new period of daylight in the sky a faint fog began to fill that entrance. It was dark like oily smoke and it crawled across the ground like a living entity. As it filled the air the light in the sky dimmed until it was all consumed. Florin's hands shook and he jumped to his

feet. He adjusted the helmet on his head to clear his eyes and held his weapon as steadily as he could though his whole body was filled with an otherworldly terror.

Through the fog, barely visible emerged the silhouette of a humanoid. It towered in the gloom of the fog, draped in a cloak darker than night that hung motionlessly over its body. Florin fought to swallow the lump in his throat and commanded his finger to pull the trigger but he was frozen in place. A red line of light emerged from the shadow with a slow, sinister snap-hiss. Florin broke the spell, pulling the trigger, and his weapon discharged over and over. Green lances of energy flew at the shadow but the lightsaber, waved dismissively through the air, deflected the bolts into the walls of the prefabs.

Cursing Florin turned and ran out the back of the alleyway. He heard the thrum of the lightsaber as it flew through the air, likely having been thrown at him, but he managed to clear the alley and get around the corner in time. Sparks scathed the back of his neck, kicked up where lightsaber had struck a wall. He ran and ran not daring look back as blue and green blaster rounds flew all about him.

“Jedi! Jedi! There’s a Jedi here!” he screamed frantically.

He pointed back where he’d come from, directing his comrades to shoot the Jedi chasing behind him but when finally stopped by a Corporal he turned to find nothing there except the general chaos and disarray common throughout the whole of the camp.

“B-b-but, he was right there!”, Florin spluttered, his words tripping over themselves to get out, “We have to get out of here! He’ll kill us all!”

The Corporal, a kid no more than 23, stared at Florin with disgust and slapped him across the mouth, “Get yourself together. There’s no Jedi here, just Brotherhood commandos. Where’s your weapon, Soldier?”

Florin blinked and looked down at his hands and realized they were empty. He’d dropped it back in the alley when he’d fled the Jedi, “I--”

“Nevermind that. Take that one”, the Corporal gestured to one beside a fallen man, “And take up a position there.”

Florin was crouching to pick up the blaster rifle indicated when a familiar thrum filled the air over his head and the Corporal fell to the ground in two wet thumps. The man’s mouth worked silently as he felt the cauterized ends of his torso, looking at the legs he no longer stood atop laying beside him. Florin, who was next to him, stared numbly. He shook himself out of it and grabbed the blaster rifle, turned and began firing as quickly as he could. The shadow advanced on him from twenty meters away. It trudged forward knocking his bolts aside with confident disdain. Fifteen meters. Ten meters. Five meters.

The trigger clicked and the rifle did nothing. It was empty. Florin back pedaled as the shadow advanced on him. The fog slowly dissipated giving definition to the being beneath the cloak. He was a sallow green-skinned Twi'lek with a terrifyingly intense glare. The man's yellow-red eyes bore into Florin's soul as he marched up to him atop gruesome metallic legs that seemed more at home on a reptilian predator than a near-human. Florin craned his neck to stare up into the ugly face of the Twi'lek who stood nearly two heads taller than he.

"How would you like to die?" the Jedi rasped

Florin's jaw chattered but he managed to spit the words out, "I w-wouldn't?"

"Very well", the Twi'lek revealed the nearly meter long black lightsaber hilt in his hand. It was tipped in a sizeable spherical ruby that captured Florin's attention for a moment before it slammed into the side of his head and his world went dark.

When he awoke he was in electro cuffs, secured to a jumpseat in a small shuttlecraft with a handful of other Liberation Front soldiers. He blinked, clearing the fuzziness from his vision. Unfamiliar men wearing matte black armor of unknown manufacture stood around talking cherrily, congratulating each other. One went down the line of captives checking medical readouts and administering minor aid to the more seriously wounded. Florin realized there was a bandage on his head and that's when he felt not only the wound there but the throbbing in his head. It started coming back to him and he remembered his last moments.

"You're awake. Look here", the medic grabbed his chin and shined a light in his eyes, "You've got a concussion but you'll live."

"Where are we going?" he groaned.

The Medic put away his tools and moved to the next guy, seated beside florin, "You're headed to a detention facility for interrogation and debriefing. My advice: tell them everything you know."

A part of him wanted to spit on the man and tell him he'd never betray his comrades but then again the last six months had pretty much destroyed any such loyalty he held for the cause. He fought for the extermination of the Force Users and their potential to impose tyranny on the Galaxy again but having finally confronted one in the full its terror he wanted nothing more to do with the cause. The Jedi could have their way, he just wanted to run to some empty corner of the Galaxy and hide his head in the sand.

The sound of metal on metal approaching caused him to turn his head away from the Medic. He was confronted by the sight of metal legs. He followed the legs up to a broad torso and further still into the visage of terror itself. Those eyes, those horrible yellow-red eyes glared down at him without emotion.

“Your wish was fulfilled it seems”, the Twi’lek said with a deep baritone.

“Uhh-- Yes. My Lord, I mean. Yes, M’lord”, Florin’s tongue tripped over itself trying to figure out the proper way to address such a man.

The Twi’lek crouched before him, “Sergeant Vurruck there gives good advice. I advise you take it but it really doesn’t matter... we have methods of extracting the information we require from you regardless.”

Florin stared back at the man wordlessly.

The Twi’lek leaned in closely, “I’ll tell you a secret though. Goros was a trap set by the Brotherhood more than a year ago. You were sent there to prepare for a battle that was never going to happen. You, all your friends, and all your comrades sat there and dug little holes for no reason whatsoever. It only took twenty good men of the Brotherhood’s 75th to gut your entire unit. The Liberation Front, and the Collective as a whole, are going to be erased from the Galaxy and not even a footnote in history will be your reward.”

“Why did you spare me?”

“Because I sense a spark within you. You’ve been lucky your whole life, haven’t you?”, The Twi’lek stood up, “You’ve always had good reflexes and good instincts, I’m guessing?”

Florin was confused, “No more than anyone else...”

“Don’t be modest. You have an affinity for the Force. The Brotherhood can train you to be so much more than you are now. Join us. When the Iron Throne is done with you, seek me out. I’m Sith Warlord Vodo Biask, Son of Taldryan.”

