

## Finding Vodo

### A Vodo Biask Story

It was a lonely place, the world of Kypres IV. The addition of the crash and the unconscious body of the Twi'lek meant this world could now lay claim to sentient life. It was a boreal world with a thin atmosphere that never quite seemed to hold whatever warmth the aging yellow star Kypres bathed it, and its two rather large moons, in. Devoid of lifeforms much larger than a domesticated canine the planet was most remarkable, in the few encyclopedias expansive enough to include it, for its rotational speed. The planet circled the star Kypres once every 412 galactic standard days and in that solar year it rotated on its own axis exactly twice. This meant world experience, relative to any point on the planet, eight seasons in a year. It was fortunate that the world sat closer to its sun than further, had a thin atmosphere, and lacked a great deal of water or it would have been a world largely covered in snow. Instead it was an island in the sea of space populated with dense blankets of coniferous trees and extensive rocky mountain ranges, small fast rivulets, and dominated by the alternation of prolonged periods of daylight and near absolute darkness.

Presently it was bright out and the star Kypres filled the sky, nearly as large as the hand Vodo extended at arm's length to shield his eyes. He blinked to clear his eyes of dust and soot as he drunkenly fumbled at the seat restraints. His ears buzzed and his skull felt like it was pressing on his brain. One of his Lekku lay on his chest, leaking crimson blood down his shirt in increasingly thick streams as it gathered the same dust clouding his eyes. He coughed and finally managed to release his restraints and nearly fell from the seat. The cockpit of the shuttle was cocked at an angle and he hadn't realized it before he was no longer held to the G-couch. His whole body hurt but it was his neck and the bruised flesh that had been against the restraints when his ship had finally struck the ground that hurt most.

He extracted himself from the wreckage of the Karufr Knight slowly, battling uphill against the inclination of the deck towards the rear-hatch and entry ramp. Thankfully whatever fire had been raging within the ship had been extinguished by the ship's emergency systems or had burned itself out after the crash. Fire hadn't reached the cockpit but smoke had wafted in and covered Vodo in soot before escaping through a hole in the transparasteel window. The landscape outside the ship was rugged. Bald granite mountains surrounded him to the rear of the ship which opened up into a wide basin of thick trees below him in elevation as he scrambled his way towards the ship's bow. It may have been the cool air that slowly brought clarity to his mind but the weight of his situation began to settle upon him, and like a man suddenly burdened unexpectedly with a great weight he sat abruptly to the ground and stared at the distant trees.

He was alone here, on a planet far removed from the Corellian Run hyperspace lanes, where no one knew to look for him, with a ship entirely devoid of power. He hadn't bothered to

check the ship's systems on his way out, they'd already been dead as he had begun falling from orbit. That rancor Lucine had seen to it that the Knight would drift lifelessly towards the planet, clearly intending that the plummet would kill him. The joke was on her then that he was still alive. Or perhaps the joke was still awaiting its punchline-- awaiting Vodo's eventual demise at the hands of disease, starvation, hypothermia, or whatever.

With the sun directly overhead Vodo shielded his eyes with his hand, like a visor, and surveyed his surroundings. The rocky mountains were home to little more than lichen, an algae-like plant organism that grew in thin, flakey colonies across the faces of stones. He did see a cleft off to the port side of the ship which lead, as far as he could tell, up to an alpine basin where he could see the top of a snow cap. There was probably a stream there, a few hundred meters away, he could pull water from. The shuttle had crashed on a rounded clump of converging mountains and had gouged a slough into the skree and rubble almost down to the treeline which was a kilometer or less away. The foliage began much quicker than he would have anticipated; all at once rather than fading from one biome into another. If there was something to eat on this planet, once any rations on the Karufr Knight ran out, it would be down there.

Taking a deep breath, after a resigned sigh, Vodo twinged in pain as he activated some new bruises in his ribcage. He took stock of his well-being. His prosthetic legs, the reverse articulated cybernetics that began at his navel and ended in cruel-looking, taloned feet were undamaged. His spine didn't seem to be in a dangerous amount of pain except for at his neck where he probably sustained more than the recommended amount of whiplash. There was a gash in his left lekku, which had already bled all over him, with little shards of transparateel still buried in it. His left shoulder was sore too and didn't seem to want to rise above the level of his chest without assistance from his other arm. If he had internal bleeding he detected no soreness in his abdomen that wasn't related to his bruising. He probably had some cracked ribs too but there was nothing that he couldn't heal from in time or with some assistance from the Force.

There was one last part of him he needed to know was operational. He closed his eyes and expanded his awareness. He searched within the ship for that familiar presence, the one that resided at the heart of his Lightsaber. The Crystal therein was like a part of himself, a constant companion that had been through war and peace with him going on sixteen years now. He found the Kyber Crystal and felt that it was whole and intact. He could feel the haft of the nearly meter long hilt and could clearly see the weapon in his mind's eye laying under a heap of furniture and equipment dislodged in the main cabin during the crash. Relieved he resolved to retrieve it next time he entered the ship. The Lightsaber would be his greatest tool here on this planet.

Still seated he looked down the mountain at the forested basin and was soon lost in thought. At first he ran through scenarios that might lead to his rescue. Zyxl or Zakai would find his notes when he failed to appear next week, looking for clues to his whereabouts. They would appear in orbit and detect the wreckage and come to investigate. Except those notes were on his datapad aboard his ship. Rian might utilize the OSI's hyperspace node monitoring systems and piece together the record of his trip to the Kypres System and send someone to retrace his steps. Except that he had employed some smugglers tricks his Apprentice Nihilus had taught him. Unless someone knew what they were looking for the Karufr Knight appeared to have

followed the Perlemian Trade Route down the exact opposite side of The Slice. They'd go looking for him near Roche or Kashyyk. No. There was no way anyone would know to look for him here unless Lucine Vasano wanted them to know.

The weight of dread held him to his seat on the rock beside the wreckage of his ship. He sat long in contemplation and thought, staring at the trees. Chances were good he had a concussion too he determined after a time. He couldn't shake the thought though of what it all had been worth. He was a man who had done many horrible things, who had justified terrible decisions, in pursuit of one thing. He accepted what had needed to be done to achieve that one thing and in return had poisoned his soul with the burden of evil. He'd spent his early years alternately a slave, a fugitive, and a hunted man. He wanted security, the sort that meant you feared nothing, and harnessing the Dark Side had finally been the thing that had made that possible. Everyone who had ever threatened him was dead and anyone who thought to try found themselves out-matched and over-powered. Until Lucine.

What then was his purpose now? It was some awful sort of cosmic irony that he was now safe. Safe at least from the slavers and bounty hunters of his youth, long since dead at Vodo's hands, the petty rivalries and politics of the Brotherhood, and the agents of of The Collective who had in recent years taken an interest in him. He was dead, so far as any of them were concerned. Lost and dead. He wasn't safe from his own mortality though here on Kypres IV-- he hadn't yet penetrated that mystery of the Force. He, alone on this planet, Vodo had no one to manipulate. No one to deceive, betray, or order about. His carefully honed set of skills that had allowed him to read other people, to use their emotions against them, to craft illusions that clouded their senses were worthless here. His vast experience fighting Force Users with lightsabers, soldiers with blasters, and waging war on the strategic level meant nothing on a world devoid of armies. He was a weapon now without a war.

The sun never seemed to move though hours passed. His eyes began to droop and it became a struggle to keep them open. Feeling like he did Vodo seriously considered letting the exhaustion overtake him and fall asleep. He knew enough about medicine to know that doing so with a concussion might prove fatal, solving most of the problems he was sure to encounter as he tried to survive here. He fought through it though. Even if it had all come to nothing, he was still not going to give up on living that easily. He remained seated, unsupported, and he stared out at his world for hours more.

eight local years passed slowly. Vodo had crashed during a period of relative warmth, though the temperature never rose much above 15C, and had quickly discovered that the day and night rhythm of the planet would be his primary foe in his battle. As the sun slipp towards the horizon and then dipped beyond it over a period of fifty days the air would grow sharp and cold until it was all-but absolutely dark. There, in the dark for fifty days Vodo struggled to stay alive as the air clung to -23C. With his lightsaber and the Force he felled trees and made fires around which he constructed a cabin of wood. Food had been scarce too, though he'd rationed out the emergency supplies aboard the ship that'd survived, until he'd discovered the acorn-like nut produced by the evergreen trees was not only edible but nutritious enough to sustain him.

Eventually too he learned to catch the few critters large enough to eat and found them sustaining as well.

He fashioned buckets from logs that he hollowed out with his lightsaber and spent hours every day marching to the stream he'd found behind the cleft he'd identified on that first day and back. With time he dug and lined a cistern with stone and stone dust he allowed to dry in a primitive sort of cement mortar and used the buckets to keep it filled. The cabin grew up beside the ship, butting up against the rear so that he could walk from it into the shuttle. There was a door so he could close it off to, preserving the precious warmth in the air of the place he lived and worked. The Knight proved to be a great source of material and Vodo cannibalized bits and pieces of it little by little. The Upsilon-class shuttle contained kilometers of wire which made for a ready supply of rope. Plates of metal could be crudely welded together with his saber to form tables, tools, and in some cases art.

After several cycles of day and night, summer and winter, Vodo found his stride. It was a familiar state of mind: a single-minded drive towards survival. He would identify a problem and he would find a solution for it. Little by little his existence crept off the razor's edge of life and death. Vodo was a builder. Not necessarily a builder of things at first but rather of systems and solutions that eventually, almost by necessity, became things as his plans grew. Where as Director of Clan Intelligence he'd built the new Office of Secret Intelligence, here on Kypres IV he built an aqueduct by hand, one stone placed at a time. It carried the water to him and filled a number of cisterns. He used pipes to build in plumbing shortly before deciding to build a new house.

There was a problem. Vodo was a man of passions and the strength of his emotions, particularly the negative ones, had contributed to his affinity to the Dark Side of the Force. Drawing upon those dark emotions he'd learned to seize the Force and bend it to his will. It always fought him, like an eel trying to squirm from his grasp. Here, removed from the life of danger of the Brotherhood, in place devoid of the need for wrath and rage, for greed or for murder he was rendered impotent. He could not summon the old anger, the old fear, and the Dark Side fled him. The passing of several years developed an uneasy sense of peace with him which with great contemplation he discovered allowed him to once more tap into the Force. With great practice and self-discovery he found a way to the Light of the Force and it welcomed like an old friend.

Equipped with the power of the Force once more Vodo began construction on his new home. It was made of stone, blocks weighing upwards of 500kg hewn from the mountain by lightsaber and moved effortlessly to the new foundations with the Force. It was lined with foam insulation from the ship and decorated with intricate wood paneling. Under the floor he installed a means by which the heat of his water-boiling fire would emerge through the floor tiles. It was a far more comfortable shelter with built in taps to the water system. Around the exterior of the building he installed a garden and experimented with growing the small local flora for cooking and added artistic flourishes.

It was in art that Vodo seemed to find a new, foreign pleasure in. Using his lightsaber he would carve images in sheets of rock remaining in the mountain after he quarried it for his projects. Feeling emboldened he moved onto blocks of stone and learned the new skill of carving an image from a three dimensional object. He made statues of all sizes, depicting

animals and people. They started small, a meter on a side at most, but grew larger and larger with each passing season. The largest erected to mark his tenth year on Kypres IV was over ten meters tall. By now he barely noticed the effort it took to use the Force to lift these growing statues into place.

The house remained small, though he would occasionally modify it to suit some new or additional need. With the grounds surrounding the house now filled with hundreds of statues of all sizes, developed and domesticated after a decade's work Vodo felt something calling to him. He was an aging man and the muscles in his back and arms were, while still strong, did not mend and recover like they used to. He would awake sore and stiff and only shake it off later after hours of work at his morning tasks. Pushing sixty he looked for ways to ignore the call as it grew louder and more urgent, looked for reasons not to leave everything he'd built here. He trusted in the Force though and packed a bag for a great journey.

It was like a bright light on the horizon that he could not see. It was a beacon he could feel in his core leading him to come to it. He came down from his mountain, looking back at the grey stone forest of statues, and made his way forward. His journey took him through ancient and empty forests, over unheard of mountain peaks, along nameless streams, and finally to the mouth of a cave.

Standing there at the mouth of the cave Vodo was filled with exhilaration; One part fear to three parts jubilation. It had taken him months, maybe even a year, of walking but he was here. There was no doubt this was it, how could it be with the thrumming in his chest this close. He felt it calling to him, it surrounded him and embraced him. It filled the air with its sound and his spirit knew that there was no reason to fear. There was no reason to mourn the loss of his old life anger or his new one of contentment. Closing his eyes he could still see everything around, though it was a ghostly image of pure light. With the Force guiding him he entered the cave and found the source. He stepped into it and was bathed in all the warmth the planet lacked. Like lowering himself into a warm pool he entered the Force Nexus and left his mortal coil behind him. Vodo released his hold on the world and became one with the Force, finally at peace.

Space is vast. Despite the existence of trillions of worlds in hundreds of billions of systems across the 100,000 light years diameter of the galaxy someone did eventually find Vodo. Not his physical form, nor did they identify him with the unusual strength of the Nexus of the Force on this out of the way planet with him, but they did find his home and felt the echoes of his presence there. They were Jedi Surveyors following the draw of a beacon in the Force to this forgotten place. With the Order thriving in the centuries since its last great crisis, in the time of the Sith and Empire, this place was identified as a world of peace and contemplation. It became a waystop on a galaxy-wide path of pilgrimage for Mystics of the Force. Though Vodo Biask Taldrya was identified from the records recovered from his ship his fate would remain a mystery that would not be solved.