

**Crew Canteen**  
**Six of Staves, YT-2000 Light Freighter**  
**In hyperspace along the Rimma Trade Route**

"I said to forget about it! I'm not getting involved!"

...

"Well that's too bad for them. Besides, you're forgetting I already got the better end of the deal here."

...

"No no no, it's *airtight*. Look, I'll spell it out for you. Anybody with a bit of time, planning, and a little luck can arrange to be found 'dead'. Happens all the time, and for worse villains than me. Letting the one *ess-oh-bee* - or just plain *bee* - who wants you dead think they did it with their own two hands, though?"

...

"Okay, first: I'm no coward; I apparently just like *living* more than you--" At this, R3-BT interrupted with a downright offended sounding binary squeal.

"Get off your high horse, you know what I mean. Living, existing, operating, whatever. As I was saying... second thing, there's no benefit to *me* here. Risk my neck for no good reason?"

Annoyed for even considering the job, Benevolent Taldrya Whiner, the inauspiciously named elder Dark Jedi, drained the last of his drink and expertly tossed the unlabelled bottle into the nearby box of empties. The R3 droid, on the other hand, dispassionately disconnected his scomp link from the computer and turned to leave the canteen. As it left though, it vocalized one final statement that came out as a trill whistle followed by a binary chuckle.

Ben grinned, and mumbled to himself, "...okay, fine. It would be pretty funny".

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**The continuing adventures of *Benny Why*, *Private Eye* are brought to you by Eopie Deathsticks. That's right, Eopie Deathsticks; the brand recommended by four out of five doctors. I'd walk a mile for an Eopie, and once you give them a try you will too! And now, on to tonight's episode.**

<Theme Music Plays>

As I sat in my automobile and watched the sun set across the harbour, slowly transforming the bright shining city to the dark shadowed monster that was her true form, I couldn't help but ponder why a guy like me made the same mistakes over and over. The first big mistake was letting my guard down, even for a moment. Second, as the song says, you gotta know when to fold 'em and when to run. And lastly, Dames. Everything about them was forever the cause of all my biggest downfalls, and tonight wasn't shaping up to be any exception. Tonight I was going up against one of the toughest gangs of the lower east side: the Plague Posse. And the dame in charge of them all? Ronnie T.

Now there was a real piece of work. When we first met, she claimed to be an innocent school teacher. She was just doing a little extracurricular research back in the day, and needed a favour. That research ran afoul of my then-employer, and I got stuck in the crossfire and had to take her down. She took it personal in a real bad way, and as it turns out, she was no ingenue. Years later, she winds up on top of the rat pile that was the Plague Posse and sets her eye on revenge. She thought herself untouchable, and stuck a knife in my back while I was focussed on her hired goon. She even left me for dead in a dark alleyway, if you can believe it. I tried to let it go; even thought of it as a sign to cash out while I still could. But when an old coworker tracks you down and offers a tidy sum to disrupt a certain organization and especially a certain former schoolteacher? Well, I'm just a working stiff, not a saint. The cash would help ease the pain in my healed shoulder on those cold, drafty nights.

The job gave me two targets: a primary, and a bonus. My first stop was a warehouse deep in Posse territory. They were involved in some big turf war, and this was their staging area for all kinds of mundane supplies: food, bandages, uniforms, that sort of thing. As the last few rays of sun winked beneath the horizon, I got out of my car, grabbed my jerry can, and casually walked in the direction of the warehouse's back entrance. You see, for the last three nights the guards change shifts just after sundown, just like clockwork. The big burly one would put on his hat and jacket, wave to his replacement - the ugly one with the scar - and he'd head off to grab his dinner. Ugly, meanwhile, was all about starting his shift with his paperwork in order. He'd hold his paper up to the door and turned his back to the street as he filled out his timesheet. You see, normally, a place like this would have better guards, but this was an all hands on deck kind of shindig going down. The good guards were guarding more important targets, which left the cheap contractor team to fill gaps at home base this week. Perfect opportunity to start a little trouble.

I timed things perfectly. Burly gets to the staff lot at the same time Ugly is turning to the wall with his clipboard. Here's my chance...around the blind corner, three quick steps, quietly set down the jerry can, one more quiet step and then I'm behind Ugly. One of my arms goes around his thick, goon-like neck and squeezes tightly, and my other hand goes over his mouth to muffle his voice. He struggles against me, but can't quite get the right leverage and it's only a matter of time before he runs out of gas. Slowly, his protests weaken as he sinks to his knees before passing out. I rifle through his trenchcoat and pull out his door key. Bingo! I take a step back and grab the can before quickly slipping inside.

At this point, I start thinking I'm in the clear, at least for now. The jerry can gets dumped out, leaving a pool of gasoline along the back wall. A small fire now will become a big fire shortly, damaging important supplies and shaking up the hornet's nest. Leaving Ugly outside is a risk of course, but nobody is going to come check on him for a good 12 minutes or so. No bystanders in this part of town.

Plenty of time to start a fire and get out of there, right? Here comes that first classic mistake again: I let my guard down.

Lo and behold, Burly comes crashing through the door, weapon drawn. Normally, you get a "Freeze!", or a "Hands Up!", which gives you a second or two to think, but I'm just not that lucky. Burly opens fire, and I just barely have time to dive for cover. A shot grazes my left calf, and as I collapse behind a stack of crates, the throbbing-but-not-searing pain tells me it's probably just a shallow wound. I've been shot or stabbed so many times in this line of work, this one deserves little more than a footnote, but I sure won't be running any marathons for the next while.

I hear Burly's heavy footsteps coming closer, and I need to act fast. I unholster my own snub-nosed pistol - a detective's special - and look around for a usable angle. Through the crates? Maybe, but I'd be shooting blind. On my left there's a small gap. Tricky shot, but with a shallow enough angle I think I could ricochet it off the floor and catch a foot or ankle. With seconds to decide, I go with the option that would make for a better story at the bar, or at my funeral. Through the crack I see Burly's shadow, and I take my first shot. He cries out, and I hear a muffled thud as he collapses to the ground. With mostly my good leg, I push myself up and on top of the crates, and instantly take my second and third shots; this time with clear sight of Burly. Center mass, clean hits. Poor guy was just doing his job, but then again so am I. That's how life in the city goes sometimes. It's not fair, it's just business.

Taking a quick breather on top of those crates, I consider my options. I've only got a few more minutes before Ugly's check-in. My employer really wants this warehouse burned, which is why it's the primary, but anything else is gravy. I should just start the fire, get out, take the money, and if anyone gives me lip for skipping the bonus, I'll remind them that Benny Why is not hired muscle. Even later, as I'm bandaging my leg in my car and watching the warehouse inferno from a safe, inconspicuous distance, I tell myself that old Ronnie still thinks I took my final breaths in that dark alleyway. I keep telling myself these things and more in the hope of maybe getting out of this one with fewer bruises than usual.

I was never that good at convincing myself.

**We'll get to the thrilling final act in tonight's episode of *Benny Why, Private Eye* in just a moment, but first...do you ever struggle with the condition of your hair? Gentlemen, do you want to look as full of vim and vigour as you did playing high school football? Ladies, do you want your luscious locks to be as smooth and perfect as Mrs. Jones in your Wednesday Book Club? Well look no further! Lion's Mane brand hair conditioner has patented formulas for all types of hair. Short or long, dry or greasy, even most colour applications. Ask your druggist for Lion's Mane - that's L-I-O-N-S M-A-N-E - brand hair conditioner today! And now, for the thrilling conclusion to tonight's episode of *Benny Why, Private Eye*.**

As I drove the short distance to the Plague Posse's main headquarters, I started going over what I knew. The Posse was a big time gang; they even had a few front companies that let them operate above board. Address and number in the phone book and everything, so it wasn't too hard to guess where the high muckety-mucks had their offices. As I said, my employer on this job wants me to throw a wrench in the Posse's operations in general, but he's also offering a bonus for anything that gets their leader Ronnie off her game. A hit is out of the question; it draws too much heat and it's not really my style. Paranoia is fine, and a visit from a ghost is sure to unsettle most people, but she's made of tougher stuff than that. What would be even better is the snipe hunt, *if* she takes the bait. For that to work though, I'd have to make it personal. So what did I know of her? Not much, truth be told. No sense of humour *at all*, liked big words when small words worked just fine, and when she got angry she'd probably punch your nose in. Oh, and she was a barely functional alcoholic. Now, that last one had potential, and a passable plan began to form as I pulled into a space across the street.

I stepped out of the car, put Burlly's hat on (I always say, never let a good hat go to waste), grabbed my briefcase and walked up to the guard booth at the staff entrance.

"Hey! Hey Buddy! I'm late for an emergency meeting, mind buzzing me in quick?"

"Uuuh, who are you? What do you mean, a meeting? It's quarter past midnight! Nobody holds a meeting in the middle of the night."

"Sammy Spade, I'm from the union. Didn't you hear about the suspected arson at the warehouse on 4th earlier this evening? Whole thing burnt to the ground, and two guards haven't checked in. Everybody knows where they're gonna find those bodies, the poor muckers. The bigwigs are meeting now to discuss the press release for the morning papers, and I'm gonna make them commit in writing to helpin' out those guys' families. Maybe even get the rest of us some better equipment and danger pay".

"Maybe I should phone this one in...", said the guard as he reached for his phone. I had to think quickly. Setting down my briefcase, I closed my eyes and pinched the bridge of my nose with one hand, as if to wipe sleep out of my eyes. The other hand I hold up to the security glass.

"Come on man, don't let them lock us out. *I'm a working stiff just like you...*"

"Working stiff just like me".

"...wouldn't you *want your family taken care of?*"

"Want my family taken care of".

"Just *buzz me in now...*"

"Buzz you in now".

"...and I'll *take care of the paperwork in the morning*".

"Take care of the paperwork in the morning".

I lowered my hands and opened my eyes in time to watch the stunned look melt away from the guards face, to be replaced by a look of sincere empathy.

"Those poor guys, I couldn't even imagine how my Margary and Junior would get on. Make sure the suits upstairs, you know, give a scholarship to their kids or something. I've seen what those fat-cats drive, they can afford it". He slipped a visitor's pass under the barrier, and a harsh buzzing sound came from the door as he held the unlock button. "Us working stiffs gotta stick together Sammy. Don't worry about the paperwork, I'll deal with it in the morning".

What can I say, I'm persuasive when it counts. I pick up the pass and thank the guard and wave to him as I enter the building. More guards here on the inside, but the combined effect of the dapper hat, professional suitcase, and almighty visitor pass make me basically invisible to their eyes. A quick sideways glance at the directory tells me the floor I want, and there's an elevator with its doors wide open, just waiting for me. I don't realize I've been holding my breath until the doors close and I'm shooting my way all the way to the penthouse. I start thinking that maybe my luck will hold out tonight. Yeah, sounds dumber just saying it aloud.

*Ding.* The doors slide open, I take a step out, and waiting for me on the ornate landing is one of the Plague Posse sub-bosses. Do I know, or care, which one? No. Those colours are gang colours, though, and he's got a sword held at the ready. I'd shoot him and be done with it, but the sound of gunfire is sure to bring all the looky-loo guards running. He starts spouting off all about how he's "got [me] now" and "the Dread Lord will be pleased" and how I "look easy to break", yadda yadda yadda. I've still got a few tricks up my sleeve in case I need to deal with that blade, but...at that moment the elevator doors start to close.

"Sorry man, wrong floor", I say as I slip back into the elevator cab and hit the button for the floor below. Mr. Sadistic Sub-boss pauses for a moment, stunned, then runs for the door and tries to tag me with that sword of his, but the doors close on it as he swings. I stand there, frozen to the spot, not sure exactly what to do about the menacing blade co-inhabiting the cab with me. As we start to descend, Mr. Sad decides not to risk any further property damage and retracts the blade. The cab travels to the floor below.

*Ding.* The penultimate floor. I block the door with my foot for a moment to think. Mr. Sad isn't gonna let me get away that easily, and he's gonna want the satisfaction of catching me himself. He'll maybe wait to see what floor I get off on, and go for the chase. Hell, if he thinks I'm just one floor down, he may try to cut me off at the stairs. I channel my inner child and run my hand down the panel, pressing every button, and wait to get off at the next floor down. Here's where I just need just a little more luck. On that landing, I call for an upward elevator. The building is sure to be quiet at this hour, and the next upward cab is coming up to me first. If Mr. Sad is lazy and I'm unlucky, he's also waiting for that cab and riding it up means that I'm right back where we started. I get in, press the penthouse button, and cross my fingers.

*Ding.* The noise echoes quietly in the silent landing. Looks like Mr. Sad is a real go-getter, and ran for the stairs to go-get. Good thing too, sword fights are terribly anachronistic and clichéd. Everyone is so over them, and this job has gone on long enough as it is. Plus my leg still hurts and I don't feel like running tonight. Another time, maybe.

With that anti-climax out of the way, I figure I've got a short amount of time before Mr. Sad figures out I doubled back on him. Let's see, big, ostentatious doors? Nah, too obvious; those are for public spectacles. Private office is going to be...that one. The non-descript door, just off to the left. There's a matching one on the right, but last I saw, Ronnie has that eyepatch and consciously or not, would probably compensate for it and scan the room left to right. At least, left is my gut feeling here. I pop open my suitcase, pull out my lockpicking tools, and finesse the lock in not-quite-record time. Sometimes in my line of work, it pays to know a few underhanded tricks.

Turns out, I guessed correctly. The desk was a similar style to her old one from many years back, with a liquor cabinet within easy reach. I break open the cabinet - no need to be gentle on this one - and survey the contents. Ah, there we are, a bottle of Whyren's Reserve. I take that and a clean glass out, before nonchalantly tipping the cabinet over and letting the rest shatter on the ground. Pour a little for myself, take a sip and...ugh, it's like drinking lighter fluid that's been soaking in burned wood. She's crazier than I thought to spend as much on this swill as she does. Oh well, there's just no accounting for taste. I snag a piece of official looking stationery and scribble down a quick note.

Hey Neighbour,

I was in town for the weekend and thought I'd stop in for a chat and to catch up, but it looks like you're out. Sorry about the cabinet; it was locked, I was thirsty, and I broke my good lockpick on your door. I'll be around your end of town for a few days on business. Come find me if you think we need to settle up.

-B

I place the note on her desk, next to the bottle and glass. I turn to leave, but...no, just one more tweak of the nose would make it perfect. Out of my suitcase I pull out a small vial. In correct doses it's supposed to be non-lethal, but it'll make you go on quite the hallucinogenic trip. Incorrect doses? All bets are off; picked the stuff up in a seedy, back alley market after all. I don't have time to measure the correct doses, so I just dump the whole thing in the bottle and give it a swish. I'm not a doctor, but she'll *probably* be fine. Worse case, it does nothing for her and she's pissed at the mess I made anyway. Best case, she goes for a wild trip and stops by to thank me later. It'll count for the bonus either way if she takes time out of her busy schedule to go looking for me.

As I step out of the office, my second oft-repeated mistake hits me like a freight train. No, that doesn't quite capture it. By "second mistake" what I mean is that I should've left sooner, because I've officially worn out my welcome. When I say "hits me", I'm referring to what Mr. Sad decided to do when he caught up with me. And lastly, by "like a freight train", he's literally tossed me through the ornate wooden doors leading to the penthouse party room. Lucky, those doors were unlocked, but you won't convince my aching back that luck had anything to do with it. As I catch my breath, lying flat on my back, I figure now is the time for that climactic battle, and once I can breathe again, what better way to start it off than with an intimidating war cry. He steps into the room, lit saber held high, and I know the perfect opening line to this battle sequence.

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"Hey! Stop screwing up my detective story with your lightsaber! The narrative doesn't make any sense anymore!"

My yell was just confusing enough to make the Plagueian Sith - still don't know or care who - pause for a moment and frown in confusion. I took a chance, pulled out my Bryar and took a shot before he did anything else. My aim was good and it would've hit him square in the jaw, but that was enough to shake him out of his confusion. He swiftly brought his saber in a downward arc, deflecting the yellow blaster bolt away.

Plan B it is then. I rolled to the side, giving me enough momentum to carry me up to my feet. As I spun, I dropped my gun and pulled out my own saber, so that as I spun to face my opponent, I was ready for him. He wasted no time in running towards me, swinging his saber in another powerful two-handed downswing. I sidestepped it, careful to keep my blade between his blade and, well, me. That mostly settled it; he seemed to prefer one of those strong-striking styles. Shii-Cho or Djem So, maybe? He took another swing, this time a sweeping horizontal that looked to cut me in half at the waist. I took a quick hop backwards to avoid the swing, and gave a nearby brazier a shove. It fell with a loud clang, but also gave me a brief respite from the repeated attacks.

I activated the comlink on my wrist and mumbled into it "BT, could you and T4 come pick me up?"

My opponent scoffed. "You think you're escaping here alive? From the heart of our stronghold? In the throne room of our Dread Lord?!"

"Well you're certainly not going to stop me", I taunted as I raised my saber again.

He leapt over the fallen brazier and swung his blade in another two-handed horizontal slash. This time, I stepped towards him and ducked under his arm. He was overextended and not in any position to block a quick poke to his heel. His leading leg couldn't hold his weight any longer, and his forward momentum carried him face-first to the floor.

As he rolled over on the floor, he screamed in a mixture of pain and rage. "This isn't over yet! I'll hunt you down and make you suffer for this!"

I holstered my saber and held out my left hand to catch my Bryar out of the air, as a little chime on my comlink told me my ride was here. Spying the open landing ramp floating just outside one of the windows, I took a quick blaster shot to shatter the glass, before carefully climbing through the opening to relative safety. I would've done a flashy, stylish leap, but despite my force-enhance healing, my leg was still too sore for that nonsense. I did have a good comeback zinger though.

"I think your *Dread Lord* already called dibs, buddy!"

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As I close my car door and get out of there, I make a note to call my old coworker, in a bit, and let him know the good news. But before I leave, I take one last look at the harbour, now pitch dark and lit only by streetlamp and cargo ship. The city was dark, cold, and unforgiving. If you're not prepared, it'll chew you up and spit you out like chewing tobacco. This was no home of saints and sinners, just us mere mortals doing what we're paid to do. Sometimes though, the pay was in more than just dollars. Sometimes, you get a good story out of it too.

**That's it for this week's episode of *Benny Why, Private Eye*. Tune in next week at the same time to your local radio station for more thrilling hijinks and mystery; brought to you by the TJ Johnson family of products. From Eopie Deathsticks to Lion's Mane Hair Conditioner, TJ Johnson makes quality products for every family, and we're proud to sponsor high quality family radio programmes like this one. From all of us out here in radio land, have a good night everyone!**

<Theme Music Plays>



## Epilogue

### Later That Morning

#### Mattock Station

#### Arx System — Brotherhood Territory

SRI Lead: Primary target disrupted, secondary has been provoked. Please forward the remaining payment to the usual accounts promptly, I'd like to spend it while I'm alive. Good hunting.

Vodo Biask Taldrya smiled a rare smile as he read the note on his secured datapad, before quickly authorizing "payment". That particular *asset* always did have a knack for causing trouble in spectacular ways, and the resulting fallout should shake things up a bit and allow some long term goals to progress. He only needed to survive the Collective to take advantage of it...

### Two Days Later

#### Intercepted from Clan Plagueis Internal Comms

Dread Lord Tavisæn,

Ascendant Fleet Control confirms the anomalous freighter departure detected during the evening in question was identified as a YT-2000 light freighter with forged IFF transponder codes. At your suggestion, the engine emissions profile was compared to records of the ship *Six of Staves*, but Fleet is unable to confirm any further details at this time. The tracking device placed by the clan operative on duty that night is transmitting; as requested, details on the beacon are attached. As per your order, Ascendant Operatives won't be tasked with any active response at this time, but you'll be informed immediately if anything else turns up.

Patrols will be doubled and a full review of policy will be conducted. Those in charge of civil security have been severely reprimanded, as it seems highly improbable that the suspect was able to simply bluff his way into secure facilities. In short, we believe he may have had internal assistance, and we'll be interrogating key individuals about their involvement.

We can't find any evidence that the suspect's clan was directly involved in the incident, but it also cannot be ruled out. In light of this and the inconclusive security footage, I have to recommend against official censure until we have more concrete evidence.

In service to the Dread Lord and Ascendant Clan,  
Office of the Overseer

*Author's Note: This was largely written in response to Ronovi's fiction entry for a similar "Take Advantage of the Chaos" fiction prompt in GJW XIII. In it, her and Zuser assassinate Ben in the middle of the Taldryan Clan Hall (how rude). She shared this fiction with me just prior to the start of this war, and said I was welcome to write a counter. If you wish to blame someone for having to read this nonsense, she deserves some of it for throwing down the gauntlet like that.*