

What Goes Bump In the Night

Vodo Biask Taldyra - 3729

The Mercenary picked her way through the wreckage. She didn't bother with wondering if she'd overdone it a bit, she'd done exactly what she'd intended to do. Durasteel panels and girders were strewn about, intermixed with viscera and gore from the Brotherhood fanatics that had been in here. She'd been thorough, not an inch of the room had been left untouched by explosions. The hard part had been to lure the defenders here in a manner that caused them to overlook the hastily assembled detonation rig. The Marines she'd sacrificed to the trap had been well spent. Four of her own drone-like soldiers for twenty or more of theirs. Maybe even a Jedi or two, who knows? They were all pulp now.

A lekku slipped from her shoulder when a noise caught her attention. Metal clanked on decking, not unsurprising given what had just happened, but something tickled the back of her mind that made her think it hadn't been merely the noise of an object falling. Had someone survived? Were they casting off the debris that lay atop them? So much for a perfect score, she bemoaned her poor luck. The sound had come from the left, around the corner of a pile of detritus.

The cavernous room aboard the Neslat Platform was silent except for the sparking of severed power cables, settling objects, and the drip-drop of a liquid somewhere into a puddle. Gwendolyn chose her steps carefully as she moved forward, as not to advertise her position as she investigated the noise she'd heard. Her excitement made it hard to keep her breathing steady as she moved and her heartbeat thumped so loudly in her ears she couldn't imagine why it wasn't echoing in the ruins of the room. She pulled the pistol from her hip, a Bryar Pistol that was more a friend than a tool, and held it up by her face at the ready.

The Mad Bomber sprang around a corner made by the wreck of some HVAC equipment, her weapon leveled, only to see nothing. The barrel of the pistol pointed here, then there, but it found nothing to shoot at. She peered into the deep shadows created by the junk around her. She listened as attentively as she could, but there was no sound of a person struggling to free themselves. No dying gasps. Nothing. Her shoulder crawled with goose flesh. It wasn't like her to get skittish, especially not after a fireworks display. Gwendolyn shook it off, holstered her weapon, and returned to the center of the room after picking her way over the metal she'd climbed over so carefully just moments prior.

There it was again! A noise that wasn't supposed to be there! What had it been? She looked around her furiously, a hand poised on her hip holster. It had been metallic, again, that was for sure. More grating this time like something hard had been dragged over a panel.

"I know you're out there... If you show yourself I promise I'll kill you quickly", her voice was thick with a syrupy sweetness.

There was nothing though. No one presented themselves, no one launched one last desperate attack to save their life. Sparks checked the chrono on her wrist. She really didn't have time to hunt a wounded, frightened peon right now. There was a time table to keep and if she wasn't on it she would be hearing from some self-important ass who called himself Boss. Gwendolyn looked forward to the day when she could send them a small gift. She was certain they'd be blown over the moon with delight when they saw what it was.

With a sigh of frustration, she set her mind right and decided the poor wretch could die slowly here on their own, wherever they were. She headed for the entrance she'd pranced through shortly after the explosions.

"Leaving so soon?" a deep, growling voice called after her.

Gwendolyn pulled her pistol and spun, her arm outreached. She pointed the weapon defensively at every likely hiding spot she could find but saw no one, "Who's there?"

The only response was a low throaty chuckle that reverberated through the room, filling it with a preternatural clarity as though it came from everywhere at once. *This is a trick of the Force*, she immediately concluded. So a Jedi had survived. No matter, she'd trained for this day.

"Your parlour tricks won't work on me, you Freak! Come out here and we'll end this right quick", her voice was full of steel, even if her belly only had iron in it.

The room began to darken. At first, the shadows grew blacker but then, like spilled ink, they grew and began to encompass their surroundings. The light, what little there was from surviving emergency panels and alarms seemed to dim until it too was swallowed by the growing darkness. Sparks clenched her eyes and told herself it wasn't real. She hit her head moderately hard with the butt of her weapon to remind herself of what was real. When she opened her eyes it was still there. The darkness. It filled the room before her. Impenetrable blackness. Smokey tendrils extended from it where it met a solid object, pulling it forward like a living creature.

Her lekku prickled with goose flesh now. *It's not real, it's not real, it's not real*, she kept repeating to herself as though the mantra would ward off the growing dread in her chest. *Frell this*, the Mercenary decided at last. She pointed the pistol at the center of the darkness and pulled the trigger three times.

A slash of white-red light pierced the blackness and intercepted the three blaster bolts. The emerald green blasts rebounded and buried themselves around her. Gwendolyn barely hesitated and again pulled the trigger but this time for longer. The weapon in her fist hummed and vibrated momentarily before she released the mechanism and it discharged a brilliant blast of light. The white-red slash whirled within the black shadow and deflected it at her. Sparks threw herself backward with surprise and was momentarily blinded by the brilliance of the shot passing over her head. Recovering her sight she saw the form of a cloaked man emerge from the shadow. He was tall, standing nearly 7ft, and his face was enshrouded behind a draping hood. In his right hand he clutched a lightsaber, nearly a meter long at the hilt, from which the

white-red slash emerged and thrummed low with excitement. He strode from the darkness like a creature out of the night, a nightmare from a children's story.

"I do not deal in tricks", the man said, his voice like gravel, barely perceptible.

"Screw you, Freak!", Gwen reached for her belt and grasped the round object there.

From this distance, chances were she'd probably catch some of the heat but times were desperate. She flicked the switch and chucked the thermal detonator at the Jedi. He disdainfully flicked his left hand sending it sailing away to his side. She could work with that. The thing exploded sending a cloud of shrapnel at them both. She was already on her feet and diving behind cover while the Jedi seemed only to turn his head. The detonation filled the room with a thundering boom and a new crash of debris as metal shards landed all over. Seizing the moment she leaped from her hiding spot with her weapon before her.

There stood the Jedi, right where she'd left him, with a circular line of shrapnel and small metal debris lying at his feet as though he'd been shielded. *Sithspit!* She unleashed the full fury of her pistol while bringing her wrist-mounted laser to bear as well and she gave him everything she had, fear gripping her mind and driving her to shoot as quickly as she could. With unnatural agility, the Jedi sprang into action. His lightsaber blade whirled, seemingly transforming into a solid wall of light. He danced and spun, bent, and juked under and around stray shots. He moved unlike anyone she'd ever seen. As he spun his cloak flung itself from the hem up into the air and then she saw them: the claw-like feet, the raptor-like knee joint, all made of darkened metal. She knew who this was.

The Bryar pistol clicked. Empty. Her wrist-mounted weapon beeped. Depleted. Vodo Biask Taldrya stood there before her, not far from where he'd begun. He stood with his cybernetic legs slightly apart, twisted slightly at the waist so that his chest faced her. From beneath the cloak's hood hung a green lekku, patterned with gnarled black-tattooed scarifications. He held his lightsaber expertly in one hand still, its point nearly touching the ground five feet in front of him. It couldn't be anyone else, she knew. This one had been in the intelligence briefs of late. His agents had been causing all sorts of havoc in Collective space. Her breath came in sharp, ragged intakes as she tried to get a grip on her nerves. Why was she like this?

"Is that all you've got, little bomber girl?" he reached up with his left hand and pulled the hood from his head revealing a stern, glowering visage.

"I got something else for you", she dropped the pistol and pointed her wrist behind her hand at him from where the rocket launched.

This time she aimed at his feet. Vodo reacted swiftly and leaped backward to avoid the small explosive as it detonated where he'd been a moment earlier. Sparks took the opportunity to turn and hightail it from the room. She ran with desperate abandon. She sprinted out into a corridor free of the wreckage and debris of her handy work. The lights flickered here still, a conduit was probably damaged in the explosion. Her feet carried her down one hall and then

another, past the bodies of Collective soldiers and Brotherhood personnel, down and down until she was out of breath. She looked behind her, hands on her knees to support herself as she gasped for air. Had she got him? If not, had she lost him?

Gwendolyn blinked as she wiped a bead of sweat off her brow and at that moment he appeared. At the end of the hall, he stood motionless. Her eyes went wide. The black mass, the shadow with no end filled the corridor behind him. She pulled her Tostovin off her back and sighted down the length of the weapon. Depressing the trigger, the Mercenary braced herself against the recoil of the weapon and discharged it again. The two explosives sailed down the corridor, passed through the figure of Vodo Biask, and disappeared into the shadow behind him. Two deafening explosions echoed back towards her out of sight. *What in the Nine Corellian Hells?*

Almost as if in response to her question Vodo Biask stepped out from a branching corridor much closer to her, his Lightsaber ignited. He grinned mercilessly and she saw soot blackened his face and the metallic legs beneath him. It had been an illusion she realized with a start. She shifted her aim to him, presumably the real Vodo this time, and was nearly pulled off her feet when the grenade launcher was pulled by an invisible hand out of her own. The green-skinned Twi'lek neatly cut the weapon in half as it flew towards him and began walking with a slow, deliberate pace towards her, giving no mind as his saber blade dipped occasionally with a bob gouging furrows into the deck with showers of sparks.

“WHAT ARE YOU”, Gwendolyn screamed at him, her panic rising again.

His answer followed her as she again took off running, “I’m what goes bump in the night...”

She threw a look over her shoulder as she ran. Vodo raised his left hand and cast it in her direction. The black shadow rushed down the corridor after her, flying faster than her feet could carry her. Trying to double her speed she tripped over an arm of a body lying in front of her and she tumbled to the ground. She scrambled back to her feet, grasped at her belt for something, anything. She looked up and there he was two meters from her. Her hand found a pill-shaped canister; the thermal imploder would kill them both but it was all she had. She screamed in fright as a hand laid itself on her shoulder. She spun and there was that grinning face staring down at her.

It was hard to breathe and her chest was cold. Was this what nervous shock felt like, she wondered dumbly? His eyes pierced her with their intensity and she saw that they were yellow flecked with red. Confused she saw that his face was illuminated by a red glow, and so was his broad chest for that matter. She looked down and saw the spear of light, white-red and thrumming excitedly, where it plunged into her ribcage. Tendrils of smoke wafted up to her and she could smell her own cauterizing flesh. Weakly, forgetting the thermal imploder which dropped to the ground unactivated, she grasped at the man’s armored chest plate for something to hold onto. The lightsaber blade retreated into its strange hilt with a snap-hiss leaving the two of them in the dim corridor.

Gwendolyn’s knees gave out slowly and she began to lower herself to the deck, slowed by her grip on his collar. When she lost that grip she sank to her knees, her eyes staring up

cloudy at his. She had the impression, shortly before all went dark and cold, that he was drinking her in. The spark of life in her was gone and her torso felt backward and she lay there, sprawled awkwardly at the Sith's feet. Vodo looked down at the Collective agent and clipped his hilt back at his belt. He stepped over her and moved down the corridor as he spoke into his comlink.

“Control, this is Director Biask. Target Cresh-3 has been eliminated.”

“Acknowledged, Director. Target Dorn-2 is confirmed dead as well by Cipher Zarec.”

“Good. Send my ship, there's one more that needs to die today.”