

## **Intruders on Caina - Stranger Danger**

**34 ABY**

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The snow and wind whipped through the air of Caina with a violent intensity, chilling most sentient beings down to the bone. Visibility was limited, and any adventurer would only see the white flurries cutting through the air. Despite the inhospitable environment, two life forms plodded their way through the gale: one a humanoid shape and the other a beast. Anyone close enough would see the distinctive shape of a tauntaun, its horns an obvious giveaway. The humanoid was a female Zeltron named Blade, who was wrapped in so many layers you could only see her eyes. Her outfit hid her feminine curves to some degree, but the angle of her chest against the rest of her body marked her distinctively as a woman. Every few minutes, she would check the nav attached to her wrist and would adjust course, heading towards the crash site that was causing everyone so much trouble. She must have been crazy to volunteer for this mission.

Earlier that day, Blade received an urgent transmission from Aedile Rosh Nyine. It was a simple message requesting her aid in the scouting of a fallen ship. These sorts of requests felt more like orders, especially since Rosh's demeanor was generally uncaring and straightforward. It was also the sort of request that Blade didn't refuse because she knew that he had picked her for a very good reason, despite the fact that she was only a Jedi Hunter. She remembered her heavy sigh of self-pity as she prepared for her mission into the heart of the cold, white vortex. On the bright side, at least it gave her reasons to bring along a few of her tequila bottles for warmth.

Blade ended her self-reflections and continued her course corrections to the ship's last known location. Riding blind in a snowstorm was suicidal enough, but doing so while distracted by self-reflections was just stupid and careless. She chided herself to stay focused, and continued her work until she reached a rendezvous point just outside the crash site's perimeter. Her tauntaun would go no further so she tied the beast to the thickest ice formation she could find and explored the rest of the journey on foot, a mere 100 meters in front of her current position.

Blade kept a low profile to the ground as she crept toward her target, eventually finding a natural rock formation to hide behind. She couldn't properly scout the crashed ship without physically going into it, but at the very least she could get an idea for who or what was nearby. She expanded her awareness to the inside of the ship, feeling for any clues that would give her a basic picture of what awaited her. Inside the ship she felt four presences, three of which were a chaotic crazy mix of contradictory thoughts and

emotions. The fourth was separate from the group and very peaceful. She stayed hidden behind the rocks, debating her next move as she stared into the snowstorm. Several possible avenues were potential solutions, but given her current skill levels she decided she would simply pretend to be someone else.

Blade hid her armory lightsaber in a discreet pocket in her backpack, double checked her kukri knife and katana, and then started her walk towards the life forms she felt through the blinding white winds. If she was more skilled, she would be shutting down her connection to the Force in order to perfect her assumed role, but she currently lacked the concentration required to achieve that effect. Instead, she relied on her natural abilities that she possessed as a Zeltron, and allowed her pheromones to flow freely into the surrounding environment.

Blade clumsily made her way to a slightly charred but intact ship, helped by the fact that the ship's exterior lighting was turned on. She was impressed that someone had kept it in such good condition during its rough landing, and was grateful for the extra lights. She walked around the ship, using its contours as a guide when no light was available, and eventually found an aft door. She took a deep breath and pounded on the door.

"Help! Let me in! Something is chasing after me. Please let me in," she pleaded.

She could feel the sudden tension and paranoia set into the group lodged within the ship. They argued back and forth for a minute or two about whether it was a trick, resolving to answer the door heavily armed. Blade had her pheromones ready, so when they opened the door she fully played her new role.

"Please help me, there are men coming after me. I don't know where they are but they were right behind me," she pleaded in a panicked anxious tone as she scanned the surrounding area for movement before addressing the men again, "I do know how much longer I can last in this storm. Please help me."

"I didn't hear any blasters going off," answered one of the men skeptically.

"Maybe they were the scouting party we killed early. Maybe there are more out there. Besides, she might be able to tell us more about them," countered the slightly taller man.

“Besides, look how pretty she is wrapped up. I bet she’s gorgeous underneath the snowsuit. Let’s help her out, and maybe we get to kill some more scouts as a bonus,” requested a third man off to her right.

“Please help me, they are coming for me,” Blade pleaded.

“Bring her in and hurry. It is cold outside. Don’t try anything funny,” warned the tall man as he raised a knife at her.

Blade gladly cooperated with the helpful hands as they steered her into the ship. They steered her into the galley of the ship; which was a mess of empty glass bottles, damaged ship parts, scattered medical supplies, and most ominously a dead woman dressed in a lab coat. Blade kept her attention averted as they led her into a chair by the main table, during which she slightly favored her left side to help her look more pitiful. She gratefully took a seat and started to shiver in order to warm up. The three men stood at the other side of the table in rough triangular pattern

“Thank you, thank you so much. You saved my life,” Blade stated in a relieved and appreciative tone.

“Welcome to our ship. This is Alpha on my left. That is Beta on my right, and my name is Gamma,” stated Gamma as he pointed each of them out with his right hand. Alpha was suspicious redhead, Beta was an easily infatuated man with dark hair, and Gamma was the tall, level headed man with brown hair. All of them had physical scars, but Alpha and Beta were much worse.

“What’s your name pretty?” asked Beta.

“How did you find us?” Alpha asked.

“Who are you and what are you doing out here?” Gamma asked as he stared into her eyes again.

“My name is Maya, and I work on a nearby mine. I was sheltered inside my apartment until some men broke in threatening to kill me. I had refused to give them my precious ore and we got into an argument, which resulted in a cut to their commander’s face. He ordered the entire apartment complex razed and sent his men after me. I pulled on my winter clothes, grabbed some nearby supplies, and ran away. It was my only choice. Thankfully the storm hid me from them, but they have been chasing me since I left this morning,” she lied.

“I didn’t see a mine or any buildings out there,” Alpha countered.

“Evil men, die horribly they will by my hands,” Beta muttered to himself, “how dare they harm someone who is pretty.”

“How could you Alpha? We barely landed the ship and we only felt the scouting party. Though I am curious how you knew they were chasing you, given you couldn’t see them. Maybe you are like us,” mused Gamma.

“Like you, what do you mean? I don’t understand,” asked Blade.

The three of them ignored her and became absorbed in their own whispered discussion for awhile. Sometimes they looked back at her for several seconds, all of them closing their eyes in concentration. She would catch the word ‘Delta’ being passed around, which made her feel very uneasy since it came after Gamma. She didn’t know who these men were, but their physical and possible mental scars in combination with their ability to use the Force were clear evidence of Sith Alchemy. She decided against shutting herself off from the Force, since she lacked control of it, and decided to double the ante. She took off her snow gear, revealing her usual training outfit that showed off her feminine curves, and settled into her chair more comfortably. It caught their attention.

“Ooo, pretty is a Zeltron. I like her. Let’s do it,” commented Beta with a slimy expression.

“Fine with me, if she dies no big deal,” said Alpha.

“You’re a lucky woman Maya. We like you so we won’t kill you today; rather, we have decided to make you better. You will be called Delta,” stated Gamma as he smiled at her.

“I don’t want to be made better. I just want to have a drink, and I even brought some tequila with me. Let’s have some together,” she offered the group.

“Don’t worry Delta, we won’t kill you. We will make you better.” Gamma said in a commanding tone that was meant to be a soothing one.

The three men walked over to her, excitement in their eyes. Blade wanted to run away right now, but she also wanted to find out the identity of the fourth person on this ship

and why there was a dead woman on the floor. She decided to take one step further down the rabbit hole before hopping out for good.

“I can walk on my own. No need to help. Let me bring my tequila though, maybe you’ll change your mind,” she reassured the men as she held out her hands in a defensive posture.

“Pretty will be our best friend forever,” smiled Beta in what had to be the creepiest of smiles.

“Yeah, or else,” warned Alpha.

“Follow me, Delta,” ordered Gamma.

Blade picked up her backpack and followed the men deeper into the ship, wondering if she was criminally insane. No sane person would follow deranged, possibly experimental subjects into the bowels of a ship, but she was doing exactly that for information. She had always been lucky and she severely hoped that today was just another one of those days. They led her down a hall and into a door off to her right. It was a laboratory of sorts that housed medical supplies, securable medical beds for four people, and a whole lot of chemicals. One of the medical beds was occupied by a young man soundly asleep, but bound to the bed. Gamma went over to wake him.

“Wake up Doc, we need you to make Delta,” ordered Gamma as he roughly pushed the doctor awake.

“Hmm? Aah! Please don’t kill me. I am just the assistant,” pleaded the young man.

“Listen Doc, we like her, so make her like us and you can live,” ordered Gamma.

“Sure, sure. Just let me go,” agreed the visibly relieved young man. Gamma released the Doc and stood in front of the entryway. Blade felt her dwindling compassion for the man disappear. Who in hell would speak so casually about human experiments?

“Over her miss, this shouldn't hurt too bad. We have even perfected our method. You should be better than Gamma over there,” reassured the Doc who was visibly shaking.

“Look guys, before we start I’d like to have a few drinks. We can even stay in this room if it makes you feel better. Let a girl enjoy a few drinks first before you start with the

needles and experiments. Let's get to know each other better. It can be a pre-celebration of Delta," offered Blade.

She reached into her backpack and took out one of her large bottles of tequila. She sat on the floor, took a swig, and passed it over to infatuated Beta.

"Count me in!" Beta exclaimed with pleasure as he sat next to her and put his arm around her shoulder. Blade was internally creeped out by Beta's attitude towards her so far, but did her best to keep it hidden. Alpha grudgingly sat down next to Beta and Gamma shrugged his shoulders but decided to join.

"Come join us Doc, we drink to Delta," commanded Gamma in good cheer.

The Doc joined their little circle on the floor and reluctantly took a swig when the bottle came his way. Blade decided she had to stall for time, a lot of time. She took another swig and passed it around for another go, everyone visibly relaxing just a little bit. She pressed her advantage as she continued to release her pheromones.

"Let's just keep drinking guys! To Delta!" exclaimed Blade.

"To Delta!" the group exclaimed.

This continued around and around the circle with Blade grabbing another bottle from her backpack when they needed a new one. Everyone seemed to be having a merry time discussing how wonderful Delta would be, how they would be such good friends, where they came from, what they were doing here, what made them sad or angry, and in Beta's case how much he anticipated having a wonderful girlfriend. Blade did not share those sentiments and she very much preferred to stay Blade. Every once in awhile she would drop in questions related to what she was calling the experiments and how one became a Delta, which often lead to long stories from the Doc about the various methods and included the three men insisting they tell their personal experience. They were sobering tales that made Blade wish she could run very far away. She kept on drinking though, betting on her second liver to drink everyone under the table. She had only brought seven bottles, but she only need six. The group was already talking to long dead relatives, crying over childhood pets, and declaring allegiances to imaginary creatures.

"Guys! We are missing someone. Where is that woman out in the galley? She must be so lonely and she isn't celebrating my rebirth! Let's go see her to make her feel better," Blade suggested.

“Monica! I miss her. Let’s go hug her and give her a drink,” suggested Beta.

“Yes! Let’s!” agreed an enthusiastic Alpha.

“Monica and I need to talk about adding a new friend,” added Gamma as if he was having his own discussion.

The group walked back out into the galley, Blade purposefully walking in the middle of the pack so she didn’t arouse suspicion. They created another circle on the floor of the galley and propped up the dead woman. Blade was about to sit down, this time further away from Beta, until she remembered something she forgot.

“Crap! I forgot the tequila and Monica wanted to try it. I’ll go back to the lab and get it,” offered Blade. There was a general clumsy assent from the group, who had started to chat with the dead woman as if she was alive.

“When you come back, sit by me pretty,” Beta requested as he made room in the circle for her next to him.

“Be right back,” assured Blade.

Blade took a casual stroll back to the lab, her gut screaming at her to run away and run away now. She picked up her backpack, snatched any datapads she could find in the immediate vicinity, grabbed her lightsaber, and then walked to the closest bulkhead. She ignited her lightsaber and used it cut an oval into the side of the ship. Using the Force she focused her concentration on the bulkhead and slowly pushed it out of the ship’s frame, levitating it several feet outside the ship. It had only been a few seconds but the cold air already started to come into the ship and she knew she had to get going. She quickly stepped through the hole out into the cold frigid air, returned the oval piece she had taken out of the ship to its original place, and sealed the outside with her lightsaber. She hoped she would be far away by the time they missed her.

She was cold since she left her winter gear inside the galley, slightly tipsy, and had to brave the storm back to the base, but she was alive and had valuable intel. She focused her attention on her body first, using the Force to warm up her muscles and increase blood flow. She also focused on her livers, using the Force to speed up their absorption of the spirits in her body so that she could run steady.

“This intel had better been worth it Rosh,” Blade muttered as she ran as fast as she could toward her tauntaun, her body a blur through the snowstorm as she used the Force to move her legs at supernatural speeds toward the simple life form that would get her back home.