

FATEFUL SERENDIPITY

Written By Blade Ta'var

A joyous song filled the air. It was one of carefree laughter, the clink of glasses, and the occasional outburst of drunken song. The warm air from the pure mass of bodies inside the cantina made it all the more intoxicating. 'The Rusty Saber' was a well known cantina on Judecca, where Blade was often found whenever she had downtime. Life had gotten a lot busier lately, but things were looking up and 'The Rusty Saber' certainly lifted her spirits when she needed it. The Zeltron sat in the back of the cantina at a more discreet table, or as discreet as you could get with blue hair, idly rubbing her finger along the rim of her shot glass.

It wasn't like her to sit by herself, but lately she had found a new distraction to brighten her days. The Warrior kept an eye on the door, smiling as a lithe woman named Celeste weaved her way to sit next to Blade. The Zeltron gave her a big hug, feeling the young woman give her a tight squeeze before taking her seat. The Arcanist slide her companion a drink and the paired toasted each other. The Rancor Tequila went smoothly down her throat, a cool burn that eased her spirits.

"So nice to see again. It's been boring here without you. What's new?" Blade asked.

"Oh. The usual. Miss me already?"

"Heh. You know it. You provide such interesting entertainment."

"Do I? I thought we just come here to rant about things."

"Among other things..." The waiter shot their way as he came to fill their glasses.

Both women laughed. It was well known that the two woman often met here and then disappeared for the night. As a Zeltron, assumptions were made but in truth they were only friends. After their long chats, they often went to enjoy other pursuits that were more often than not forms of petty vigilantism. Celeste didn't have the Force to aid her, but she could more than protect herself with just her fists alone.

Her companion waited for the man to leave, nervousness dominating her aura. Blade frowned, wondering what was wrong.

"Hey, everything ok?"

"Yeah, of course. I am just a bit preoccupied."

“Don’t worry about work. It’s girl time now!”

“Heh. True. Reminds me, want to hear the latest report?”

“You bet I do!” Blade leaned towards Celeste, waiting with bated breath.

The intelligence officer, who Blade knew as Celeste, mentally laughed to herself.

So eager. Perfect for Alethia.

Celeste dove into her report, smirking as the Excidium Quaestor took notes on a datapad. Her new friend studiously marked down each offender’s information, actively discussing the more gruesome ones with prodding questions. She didn’t know for sure why the Zeltron cared but the recorded holo videos of the Quaestor’s night time wanderings gave a few solid clues. Regardless, the young woman felt certain Blade would do the job well.

Truth as bait? Delicious.

Celeste bit her lip despite her amusement. She’d seen the Warrior’s file and added a lot of new material to it herself. It was full of videos, recorded conversations, copied documents, and more importantly her own notes. Over the last few months, she had gotten to know the Zeltron despite her frosty exterior. They drank together, fought crime together, and even hung out. Of interest, during the videos and their shared bouts of vigilantism, the Arcanist always insisted on declaring a person’s guilt first and it was often accompanied with a reason before they were punished. In addition, she didn’t know much about Blade’s family as the Warrior resolutely kept to the answer ‘they’re all dead’, but she she suspected there was more to it.

Just do it, Celeste. She only kills bad guys.

She sighed, double-checking the cantina before she looked at the Zeltron seriously, staring into the crystal-blue eyes.

“Blade, I have an offer for you.”

“What is it?” The Quaestor stared at her curiously.

“What if I told you that I wanted you to meet someone who could help you get rid of miscreants for the Jedi?” Celeste asked as she stared back the Warrior, taking note of the mixed reactions on her target’s face.

Blade stayed silent, shock and excitement vying for expression. She settled for a serious look back at her companion, tinged with the smallest amount of betrayal. In the end, she understood though. She herself led a double life. It was hard not being able to fully share your true purpose

with others when you weren't sure you could trust them. She dearly wanted to help them, but could she get away with it? Everything hinged on her next answer.

"Were you conning me this whole time?" It was all the Zeltron could get out for now.

"No. Those were my words and my words alone."

"Are you a Jedi?" A small part of her hoped this was true despite her evidence to the contrary.

"No. I only help them. I truly believe that what I am doing is right. I think you believe that as well. Let's up the stakes. I can help you. You know my motives and the family they took from me. Do you doubt my intent?"

"No..." The Warrior drummed her fingers on the table, going over the past six months in her head. It fit together well enough.

"Well, then what do you say?"

"Going to leave if I say no?"

"No, you will still get my reports, but my friend can offer you much more than that."

Her heart beat furiously against her rib cage. This was what she wanted. The last six months had been the best. So many horrible people dealt justice for a change. She needed that intel and it made life a lot easier.

"One thing doesn't make sense to me. Jedi don't do this. Explain that." Blade demanded skeptically.

Wonder how much she cares about the Jedi... thought Celeste as she took a sip of her drink. It hit the table with a *thud* that seemed to drown out the chaotic yelling and singing from the cantina.

"Easy. You aren't the only one who cares about them. Some go about it in different ways."

The Arcanist's lips parted for but a second in shock, betraying her thoughts. She went back to tapping the table, letting the offer hang in the air as she felt Celeste's anxiety in the Force.

"Celeste, my dear friend. I forgive you, but only if you buy me the next round of drinks and take me to see your friend." Blade slyly smiled, holding back a wave of overwhelming hope. She wasn't alone...

Two weeks had passed but Celeste had finally set up the meeting. It was taking place on an unaffiliated planet that generated plenty of traffic due to being right next to a trade route between the various clans. The Warrior walked next to her as they made their way down a busy thoroughfare to a local restaurant. They entered, only to be immediately ushered to a privately reserved table on the third floor. The top floor was perfectly maintained, yet there was no sign of recent use.

“She will be right with you. Please take a seat, madam.” The waiter opened the door, revealing a single circular dining table.

“Wait, Celeste? Aren’t you joining?”

“Sorry. This is between you and her. I have other things to do. Good luck girl.”

The Zeltron simply shook her head. “Alright, more food for me. Thanks.”

“No problem!”

Blade watched her retreating figure for a heartbeat or two and then took the seat facing the doorway, waiting on her mysterious guest. A graceful, slender woman with silver hair and a beautiful blue outfit approached her, flanked by two men in civilian clothes.

Guards?

The Sith took a deep breath and sat up straight in her chair, ready to defend herself. She took matters into her own hands.

“I was told to dress nicely. Didn’t realize that you just wanted a date. Could have just asked me.” The Zeltron teased with a smirk as the woman took the seat opposite her. The woman smiled.

“The stories about you are true. My name is Alethia. Pleased to meet you.” Alethia gave her a disarming smile.

“Same. Name is Blade. I was told you could help me out. I am hoping this will be worth the trip.”

Alethia merely chuckled. “We have plenty to talk about, but first I am starving. Let’s eat.”

“No complaints here.”

The two women put in their orders and then delved into lighter topics, both smiling politely at each other. The Sith could not help but put on a show, testing her new acquaintance with wave after wave of pheromones. Alethia merely looked amused, sipping her wine as she studied Blade. The game of ‘cat and mouse’ was suspended as a waiter placed their food in front of them,

bowing as he left the room. The pair of woman silently agreed to dig in, watching each other from the corner of their eyes. The Zeltron noticed her dinner partner's refined manners, doing her best to impress as well. Before she knew it, their plates were already clean.

As if on cue, the plates were swiftly cleared from the room and the guards locked the door behind them. Alethia's disarming smile quickly disappeared as one of her men placed a folder in front of the Jedi representative. Her steady hand slowly unwrapped the string holding it shut. The Warrior looked at the folder curiously at first, but she cringed as it was opened. Clips of pictures looked horrifyingly familiar, many of them including herself.

"You ok?" Alethia asked as she carefully watched the Sith.

"Yeah. It's nothing."

"Ok. Well, down to business. Celeste tells me you can help the Jedi out. As you can see, we've been watching you carefully. I'd like to ask you a few questions before go forward if that's ok."

The Sith doubted she had much of choice and did her best to hide a grimace.

"Go ahead."

"Good. First question, tell me about this one." Alethia asked as she pushed the first picture across the table. It was one of her earliest victims. Multiple stab holes marked the body as the face froze in agony. Guilt, forever her old enemy, was returning, threatening to make her turn her head away. She took a moment to breath and stared resolutely at it, hating herself for her past actions and hating that Alethia forced her to see them.

"Well?"

"What is there to say? He was an animal. Nothing more and nothing less." Irritation crept into the Sith's tone.

"Hmm. Ok. This one?" Another picture was presented in front of her. A master-student pairing lay dead on the floor with angry red lashes across their backs. She balled her hands into fists under the table as she focused on keeping her breathing calm, forcing herself to look at each picture. She had done all of that. Every swing. Every bruise. Every death. Despair washed over her for but a second, but she snapped her iron resolve against it like a lightsaber biting through flesh. She was doing this for the Jedi Order because they couldn't. Period. Killing bad guys was good, no?

Deal with it, Blade.

"They wanted to uphold the Sith Empire and paid for it." The Zeltron replied coldly.

“And these?” The woman laid out the rest one by one, taking notes as she watched the Sith Warrior react to each one. The Arcanist stared at each one, anger seeping into her voice with each picture.

BANG!

Blade slammed her fist on the table and seethed, glaring at the Jedi representative.

“What’s the point of this exercise? Are you judging me?! Because each and everyone of them deserved it. I didn’t see anyone else getting rid of them. If the Jedi can’t do it, I’ll do it for them whether they like it or not. If you are going to help me, then help me. But this exercise is pointless.” The Sith growled with enough menace to hopefully dissuade further questions.

“Calm down.” Alethia steely ordered, carefully watching the Zeltron’s yellow eyes.

The Arcanist glared momentarily at the bodyguards, whose guns were trained on her. She didn’t want to harm any of them. Blade closed her eyes and took a few deep breaths, letting go of as many of her negative emotions as possible.

I’m the Sith in the room. They aren’t.

A fresh scoop of shame filled her gut. She used it to soften her edge and opened her eyes again once more. She could hear the frantic tapping as the woman took notes.

“Much better. One more question. Do you have any family?” Alethia asked in a satisfied tone.

“No. They are dead.” Memories of Blade’s loved ones living life care-free filled her thoughts. She didn’t even hear Alethia speak as she asked a follow on question.

The Sith sighed and let the memory slip away like water in cupped hands. Sadness filled the void, but she felt calm once more.

“Look. I’ll make this simple. I am assuming that entire folder is about me. You already know whether or not you want me to help you. Celeste told me you were open minded to my approach. You’ve seen what I do. And you know why. I will kill any bad person you give me. Do the Jedi want my help or not?” Blade asked sternly, staring Alethia down.

The woman gathered up the documents and slowly re-winded the string around the folder clasp. She handed it back to one of the men, and then returned her gaze back to the Sith. Finally, Alethia broke into a broad smile.

“I accept your help, Blade. You are the just the person I need. I’ll provide you targets to eliminate. I have no issues with your methods, nor will I interfere with how you get rid of them. In return, I ask that you share pertinent information that affects the welfare of the Jedi or those trying to escape to Odan-Urr for sanctuary. Deal?” Alethia offered as she reached out a hand.

The Excidium Quaestor smiled for the first time in many minutes and shook her hand.

“Deal. When can I start?”

“Now. Take this secure datapad. You can use it communicate with me in the meanwhile until we arrange another meeting.” Alethia offered as she slide over a small pad.

“I imagine you will still be watching me.”

“Of course. First hand confirmation of success. Much safer means of not attracting suspicion.”

“I guess I don’t have a choice. Thank you for the help. I appreciate it.”

“No. Thank you. The Jedi are indebted to you.” Alethia insisted. “I’d like to give you a small token of our appreciation.” She raised a hand and one of the men procured a bottle of Rancor Tequila from his pack and placed it on the table along with a pair of glasses.

The Zeltron grinned. “Now you’re talking. I accept. I insist that you stay to help finish off the bottle.”

“Business is concluded. Why not?” She smiled jovially as she poured the glasses and handed one to Blade.

“To Justice,” toasted the Sith.

“To Justice and the destruction of the Sith,” amended Alethia.

Blade smiled in agreement. A Sith and a member of Odan-Urr clinked glasses together as they drank to the destruction of the Sith.

How odd and yet so wonderful.