

# **A HESITANT HAND**

**By Blade Ta'var**

Dry dirt crunched underneath as Blade casually walked along a desolate landscape, abandoned homes decaying all around her and the trappings of families long gone strewn across the ground haphazardly. The hooded Zeltron slowly made her way to the center of town, running the tips of her fingers against the crumbling walls of the hovels around her as she reached out to the Force. Inevitable, silent tears fell down her face as they told their sad story. She saw memories of hunted humanoids fleeing for their life as a red blade cut through them, even the women and children.

The Sith clenched a shaking fist and resolutely marched towards center square. It was empty, save for debris swept into it by the wind and toppled pillars. Lightsaber marks burned like scars into the masonry of the floor and pillars. With a purposeful stride, Blade walked to the very center, which had started to accumulate broken statues and columns. *One lightsaber had caused all this*, she thought despondently.

Unclipping her lightsaber, she activated it with a *snap-hiss* and went to work, using the Force to lift bits of rock as she cut them precisely with her lightsaber. The Zeltron was by no means an engineer of any kind, but after several attempts she succeeded in making a makeshift memorial in the shape of a raised but squat circle. Blade turned off her saber, reached into her pocket, and placed a small holoprojector on top, activating it as she took her hand away. Names of the dead scrolled by automatically as well as some warm wishes and photos she had found on the holonet.

The Sith watched it in its entirety, mentally far away yet still physically in the present. The sound of a broken pot broke her concentration, and she twisted round towards the source of the disruption. The Zeltron's eyes narrowed as she quietly stalked closer and closer to the odd noises. Voices eventually accompanied the rough shuffle of objects, culminating in a surprised cry.

"I can't believe it. Jackpot!"

A flare of anger flashed through Blade as she listened to what sounded like a youth bragging about his stolen loot. It was certainly not his, the owners were dead. She slunk to the main door and peeked around the corner of the doorless building. There, busily loading up a sac, was a teenage boy with a dark complexion and brown hair, wearing tattered and dirty rags. Several fresh bruises shown like dark hideous spots across his arms and legs. His hand reached out for a small nondescript doll, one a small girl might have owned. The Zeltron had had enough. She stepped into the building, clipped her lightsaber back to her belt, and drew her katana, pointing its tip threateningly at the youth.

The boy jumped instinctively away from it, backing into a corner with his precious loot.

“Thief, what are you doing here?!” Blade demanded angrily.

“I-I just...” stammered the young adolescent as he fidgeted with his sac of stolen goods, doll in hand.

“Explain yourself!” thundered the Zeltron as objects nearby shook seemingly of their own free will. She wasn’t much taller than the boy, but he nonetheless cowered in her presence. She gave him a few seconds and then advanced a step. “Now...”

The boy seemed to freeze, assessing his options, until his face hardened into a determined expression.

“I need the money, ok? My parents, they’re dead! My family, dead! Everyone is dead! I was looking for something to sell and in the process found her doll. This is all I have of my little sister. The rest was already stolen by other rival gangs. So kark off! I don’t have much choice, now do I?” Angry tears danced down the lad’s face as a torrent of anger and grief seeped into the Force.

Blade stared at the young adolescent, his rant bringing back memories of his family’s demise. *I missed one*, she thought as she examined his face. He looked a lot like his father, and had his mother’s spunk. Guilt threatened to overwhelm her as she remembered his family’s last moments. The boy didn’t know who had truly killed his family nor his friends, but the Zeltron knew. She had just clipped back on the lightsaber that did it.

Blade stood still as indecision plagued her, heart racing. Her mind threatened to split itself in two as it viciously fought over the conundrum this boy had presented. He was thief, like his family before him, and he was angry, very angry. His pain washed over her in the Force, hitting her like a blunt object. She had turned him into this monster. The Zeltron’s hand tightened on her hilt for a few breaths and then loosened as she returned her weapon to her scabbard.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized contritely, “I didn’t realize this was your house.”

“It’s ok. Just...let me go,” pleaded the boy as he slowly got back up, belongings in hand.

Blade thought of ways to punish the boy’s thievery, but was no longer sure it was even the right thing to do. She had punished his father for his crimes — along with the rest of their criminal society — and all it did was create the angry, grieving mess of hormones in front of her. Paralyzed with doubt, she could think of only one option that did not involve a fight. Uncertain and wary of the lad’s intentions, she simply shook her head.

“Follow me. Please. I have something to show you.” Blade offered as she walked out of the house and went back to her newly constructed memorial.

The teenage boy followed like a mouse behind her, staying far enough away to flee but close enough to satiate his curiosity. The Zeltron forced herself to put one foot in front of the other, fear and doubt clouding her mind. She had a different path to follow now, one that was making her doubt almost every action. What was the alternative though? Create more angry children?

Blade stopped in front of the holoprojector and turned it on once more, stepping back to allow the youth full access.

“Go ahead. Look. A present to remember everyone that died here,” she offered as she waved him forward, the blue light drawing the boy closer. He reached out with shaking fingers as he watched the procession of the dead, fingers touching the hologram as his family’s names appeared. The boy broke down and fell to his knees, crying uncontrollably for what felt like an eternity. Blade gave him his space, guilt-ridden as she processed the fact that she had caused so much pain and suffering.

She sighed and hung her head, debating whether she should stick around for the ending, paralyzed yet again. She needed to move before he got to the end, before he knew. She took out a business card for a merchant who owed her a favor, scrawled a hurried note on it, and gave him some credits for the journey. Resolved to avoid a fight, she walked over to the grieving child and deposited both next to the holoprojector.

Putting her hand on his shoulder for a brief moment she said, “I’m sorry. Please keep that safe.”

The teenager barely registered her, save for a nod, absorbed in his own grief.

The Zeltron walked away, disheartened and disappointed in herself. She had tried so hard to prevent pain and suffering, yet all her attempts did was cause more of it. She dearly hoped he would take her advice.

*Am I doing this to Scholae as well?*

She put her hands in her pockets as she shuffled away, thinking of the dead. She couldn’t go on like this, nor could Scholae have her sword. She would find another way. She had to...

-----

Eventually, the boy got to the end and paused as he read the final words: *I’m sorry. I could have found a better way.*

Shock kept him from raging, stunned that he may have just meant the person responsible for it all. His hands balled into fists as he yelled to the sky, “I HATE YOU!” Angry tears fell to the ground as he got up, resisting the urge to chuck the murderer’s gifts. He couldn’t chuck the

holoprojector — it meant too much — but he had no trouble chucking the credits. A strange sort of rebellious pleasure filled his spirit for a few seconds before reality sunk in.

*Those were credits!!*

The young adolescent rushed after them, picking them up with haste. He pocketed the money, claimed the precious memento, and then curiously read the business card.

*Be better than me. Find another path. A job, if you want it.*

*Sid, you owe me.*

*-B*

The boy scowled, but pocketed it anyway. He didn't want her help, but it was all he had at the moment.