

At Least There's No Sand

"I'm sorry," he said. The woman's screams of pain and unbridled hatred drowned him out. She lay in the dust before him, smoking stumps where her hands had been. Teikhos had been dodging these huntresses since his pod hit the dirt an hour earlier, and this poor wretch had been the first to catch him.

The Zeltron waved one hand as he clipped his deactivated lightsaber back to his belt. "Shut up and drink this."

The huntress—a Kiffar, he thought, though the Collective might as well have turned her into a new species entirely—grew quiet and her eyes lost their focus. Teikhos leaned down and popped the lid off of his canteen, holding it to the huntress' lips as he cradled her head with his other hand. She drank greedily, whether from genuine thirst or the compulsion of the Force, until the Jedi pulled the canteen away and tucked it back inside his robes.

"They'll find you," he said, brushing a dreadlock off of the woman's face, his hand lingering on the yellow streak beneath her eye. "Hopefully before they find me." He sighed, stood up, and set off into the Badlands. Behind him, the huntress start screaming curses again.

Teikhos didn't know where he was going. He wasn't sure he cared: it probably didn't matter which direction he went. The Badlands extended for hundreds if not thousands of kilometers in every direction. The whole world was crawling with Sith and Collective, from whom death was the best thing an Odanite could expect. In the exceedingly unlikely event that he did somehow stumble into an O.E.F position, the friendly troops would doubtlessly be in the midst of heavy combat. His limited survival training told him that giving any water to the huntress was a mistake, but realistically the dust storms or the cold of night were more likely to kill him than thirst. Before he even got to that point, he'd have to fend off the dozen or so huntresses that he felt whenever he closed his eyes and reached out to the Force.

His master, Edgar Drachen, had occasionally joked that Teikhos would die by being chased to death by beautiful women. It seemed that the Force had a sense of humor after all.

He walked for another two hours before she caught him. He'd been dipping into the Force to sense his pursuers more and more frequently, his sense of Jedi tranquility losing out more to curiosity than worry. Teikhos had revised his earlier assessment: the boredom of trudging through this endless wasteland was more likely to kill him than anything else.

A spot on the hardpan about a half-meter to his right exploded into dust as a gunshot cracked out across the plain. The Jedi turned around slowly, drawing his lightsaber but leaving the blade inactive. A Chiss stood about a hundred meters back, a slugthrower aimed at him. Teikhos had never seen one of the stupid guns before joining Odan-Urr, but they seemed to be a common specialty among people who wanted to kill Jedi.

Teikhos stared at the figure as she drew closer, with the Force as much as his eyes. He could feel her—definitely a her; he could always tell—burning in the Force, her passion radiating out like heat from a bonfire. It was an emotion the Zeltron was very intimately acquainted with: lust. Lust for his blood and not his flesh, unfortunately, but the feeling was the same regardless of its object. The aching desire, the anticipation that had been building for hours, the sensation of wanting something so badly that your entire being seemed to vibrate.

I don't think I'm going to be able to talk my way out of this one.

That first shot had been meant to get his attention. The woman could probably have put a hole into his back from that distance, or at least grazed him, but she wanted to see him die. She wanted him to see *her*, too, to know her and share with her the moment of his death.

But hey, at least she was cute.

The pair advanced towards each other at a brisk pace, drawing closer by the second. The other Shikari huntresses were far enough away to ensure that the combatants would not be disturbed. The Chiss raised her weapon, drawing a bead on Teikhos' face before abruptly dropping the barrel down and firing at his thigh. The crack of the bullet against a globe of invisible force echoed the initial sound of gunfire. The Jedi stood firm as his opponent unleashed another two shots before giving up and holstering her weapon. The slugthrower was quickly replaced by an electrowhip.

“What's your name?” the Zeltron called out as the woman approached. “I prefer to get a girl's name before she breaks out the toys.”

“Cute,” the woman said, spitting into the dust near the Jedi’s feet. “Kendra Icasta.”

The Jedi ignited his lightsaber with a flourish and bowed slightly. “Teikhos Seleukides. It’s a pleasure to—”

“I don’t care what you’re called,” Kendra snapped.

“You wound me,” he answered, settling into position. His right leg led the way, though most of his weight was on his back foot in preparation for a thrust. Elbow high, he held his blade straight out before him, angled downward but just a few degrees. Kendra, for her part, unfurled and cracked the whip.

“Worse than that,” she replied. With a grunt, the Chiss sent the whip hurling through the air, cracking as it lashed out against the Jedi. With a flick of his wrist, Teikhos’ blade found the whip and caught it. The charged cord looped around and around the lightsaber blade, sparks jumping off in every direction, but slipped off as the Zeltron jerked his elbow back.

Kendra narrowed her eyes as she snapped the whip back to her side.

“That whip disarm doesn’t work as well as you expected, huh? It’s pretty slick if the enemy holds his blade straight up like a—”

Two more strikes interrupted him in quick succession, each equally futile.

“Listen, Kendra, this is fun and all but—”

This time the Chiss raised her other wrist and shot a small dart at his face. As Teikhos raised his blade to catch it, Kendra struck again with the whip, only to shout in frustration as it bounced harmlessly off of a corona of solid energy in front of her prey.

“—I’d really rather just buy you dinner and work this out less aggressively. Or with the fun kind of aggression. You can keep the whip, but we’ll need a safety word. For safety.”

Teikhos frowned slightly as the woman’s emotions bled into his perception through the Force.

“For some reason, I get the impression that you’re mad at me.”

Kendra snarled, lashing him again and again to no effect whatsoever.

“Kendra, honey, *put the whip down*,” he said with a firm voice and a wave of his hand. The electrowhip slipped gently from the woman’s fingers and hit the dusty ground with a soft thud. Teikhos relaxed slightly, letting the barrier between them lapse...

...only to immediately regret it as the Chiss recovered her senses, grabbed the pistol and emptied the clip at him. The line of blue fire danced around in a blur, swatting five slugs into vapor before the Jedi fully realized what was happening. Instinctually he launched himself forward, his back leg a spring driving his blade forward to Kendra's heart.

Of course, that relied on his front leg being structurally sound enough to hold his body weight as he lunged forward. The lone slug that darted through his defense and ripped through the muscle and bone of his thigh complicated matters. The tip of his lightsaber did manage to singe several of Kendra's ribs, incinerating skin, muscle, and a good bit of her left breast in the process, but ultimately the blade fell short of its mark as Teikhos landed in a heap in the dust with a shout.

Kendra screamed like she hadn't since the day she lost her eye, stumbling backwards and falling to the ground herself. For a moment, all either of the two knew was pain, the hum of a lightsaber, and the ragged breathing of two strangers in the wastes.

After a false start, the huntress pulled herself upright, biting on her lip hard enough to draw blood rather than utter so much of a whimper in pain. The edges of her vision were a white haze and she couldn't hold her hands steady, but she was standing and the Jedi was not.

"I'm sorry," the Jedi said with eerie calm. He held one hand pressed to his leg, and there was blood everywhere, but whatever pain he felt—and he *must* be hurting, Kendra knew—never made it to his face. His breathing was steady but shallow. "I wish I hadn't done that, but reflexes." He deactivated his saber and tossed it aside.

Kendra's eyes darted between the Jedi and his weapon as she tried and failed to make sense of the gesture. Her hand fumbled at her side until it found the stun baton, but she held her ground, wary of advancing against a Force-user in her present state.

"Yeah," he started, eyes meeting hers. "You should be afraid. I could probably have just thrown that thing at you and taken you down."

The Chiss shifted her weight uncomfortably.

"Don't worry," the Jedi continued. "Even if I *can* fight you, I won't."

"Why not?" Kendra blurted out, her own words surprising her as much as the Zeltron's.

“I’m not making it out of this place, even if I could avoid your girls. Killing you would just be hateful. I’m sorry I even hurt you.”

Blue knuckles grew pale as she tightened her grip on the baton. “I’m not going to spare you.”

“I didn’t expect you would.”

“I won’t make it quick.” She was mostly bluffing, though if she could manage to power through her injuries long enough to beat him to death, it probably would take a while.

“Fair enough. Can you do one thing for me, though?”

Kendra narrowed her organic eye. “What?”

“Let me see you smile.”