

# **NO MORE DEAD CHILDREN**

By Aura Ta'var

## ***Jedi Praxeum***

**Kiast**

**40 ABY**

The spires of the Jedi Praxeum towered above the mayhem below them, turning the once tranquil grounds into a hellish landscape. Crystal-laden abominations were striding across the mountainous terrain, a bluish glow following them in their wake as the crystal formations inch by inch forced their way through the school ground's fertile soil. Dead Odanites were scattered all over the field, their last dying breath defending the students of the school. There had been no time to recover them yet. Their silent vigil was a reminder for the living to stay keenly aware of just what waited for them should any be unfortunate to make a mistake or be surrounded.

Aura Ta'var took in the scene from the barn doors of an outlying farm building just inside the outermost defensive line, scavengers already circling overhead, and grimaced. This was a school for children and yet here they were. Yet another reminder of why the light of the Jedi must be constantly protected. *Why is it always the Jedi younglings?* she thought to herself.

"Master Ta'var, there's too many of them. What are we going to do?" came a young voice from behind her.

The Zeltron turned around and saw one of the younglings grasping their training saber as he peered out from behind one of her legs. The young boy had dark brown hair, blue eyes, and a determined gaze.

"Oh no, you won't need to fight today. You are going to hide inside the hay shed with the rest of the younglings," she said as she steered him back towards the others.

"But, I can help. That's what Jedi do, right?" said the boy as he almost tripped over his own two feet, already halfway back to safety.

"It's not your time to help yet. You need to grow strong in the Force and live," said Aura, silent tears falling down her face as she gently guided the last youngling back into the hay shed and went to shut the door.

"Master Ta'var, anger is a path to the dark side," said another youngling from within the darkness.

Aura Ta'var wiped her face with the sleeve of her robe and took a deep breath. They were right. These were angry tears. She looked into the darkness as she shut the latch closed once more, feeling each of the padawan's bright lights in the Force.

“You’re right. Emotion yet Peace,” she took a deep breath. “They won’t touch you. I promise. Now stay quiet and be ready to run on my mark,” she whispered before walking away and striding out of the barn.

The Jedi Master opened herself up to the Force and activated her blue lightsaber with a *snap-hiss*. She could sense five dark presences approaching her. As the pack of enemies crested the hill, she got a glimpse of the once-human abominations. Their appearance was none too threatening, pegging them as Nightfallers. Aura recalled hastily being told the intel on them as the first sirens ran out but much was lost in the noise.

The Zeltron pulled the Force into her legs and ran towards them, heading them off before they could sense the younglings properly. The Nightfallers activated their red sabers and attacked her like a pack, already trying to encircle her. She waited till they got closer and slammed an open palm into the ground, causing a shock wave to emanate out from her and throwing the combatants backward. They mostly landed gracefully on their feet but Aura was already charging one that had tripped on nearby rocks. Her saber came down in a vicious overhead strike, which the Nightfaller barely blocked.

Her danger sense tingled and she quickly spun around her target until she was behind him, narrowly dodging four red sabers as they plunged into the fifth’s torso. The Zeltron quickly blocked the sabers with a whirlwind of swings, patiently knocking away their assault. The now-dead Nightfaller fell apart in pieces in front of her, its so-called comrades taking advantage of its bulk to edge around her again.

Dances of red light tried their best to get past a blue haze as the Jedi weaved her saber around her in a protective cone, reflecting back the attacker just enough to catch another red blade before it critically punctured her. Aura snuck glances around her when gaps appeared and spied several larger rocks nearby. Using the Force, she lifted them up from the ground and positioned them on either side of her around torso height. With a pull, she sent both of them careening towards her. As they rushed through the air, she jumped up at the last moment and backflipped onto a small hill above her, slightly panting at the effort. A crushed torso made her grimly smile though. Three versus one was more of a fair fight.

“Red 1, what’s your ETA? We need an evac. Location Dorn 5,” she spoke into her wrist comlink.

Two Nightfellers were already racing towards her position with a third starting to disappear in front of her. The Jedi engaged the third one directly, jumping a few meters away from where she felt its presence, and stabbed several times forward from several directions. A painful yelp let out as the Nightfeller reappeared but didn’t back down. The injured Nightfeller snarled and wildly swung its saber at her, collapsing painfully to the ground as it clutched its burnt side. The Zeltron didn’t hesitate and spun out of range, sweeping her saber along with her so it cut into the ground. The third Nightfeller cried out no more, now cut in half.

*Two more...* she thought.

She heard her comlink come to life. *Dorn 5, this is Red 1. ETA 5 minutes.*

Aura gritted her teeth and walked towards the remaining two Nightfellers, who finally looked at her cautiously. They took on a hunter's stride, pacing a short distance away. She could feel what felt like a lifetime of heartbeats go by until finally one of them paced forward, the other taking point by the same pile of rocks she had used earlier. The Nightfeller charged forward and executed a flurry of vicious strikes she recognized well. At the same time, the other Nightfeller lifted up a flurry of smaller stones from the earlier rock collision and sent them pelting toward her.

The Jedi fell into her defensive stance once more, deflecting the red saber gunning for her life as well as the equally dangerous rubble. As her saber cut through a particularly larger chunk, it merely split it two though, the fragments smacking directly into the side of her torso. She grunted in pain and quickly slid into a crouch as a red saber whooshed overhead.

*Not fair,* she thought.

The Nightfellers continued their joint assault, emboldened by their success to push forward. Aura Ta'var raised her saber defensively over her head and pointed it towards advancing Nightfeller. A bead of sweat formed on her brow as she both repelled the rocks with the Force and used her saber to bat away the red lightsaber trying to cut her down. She let the smaller ones pelt her body, leaving what already felt like future bruises, and focused on the larger ones. One, in particular, she managed to stop in its tracks; but as soon as she kept it still enough, it fell to the ground and another was already careening her way.

The Jedi retreated backward but no cover was to be found. She took a deep breath and cut a larger rock in half, dodging it instead of pushing it away. One half struck her calf and she yelped once more. The advancing Nightfeller smiled greedily and rushed forward. Aura abandoned her defense and rushed to join him, saber meeting saber. Neither of them lingered in one position too long, the clashes of their lightsabers loud but short like a staccato in quick succession, both relentlessly homing in on a soft spot.

The Zeltron felt another rock coming her way and lured the Nightfeller in front of her, the small projectile hitting the small of his back. As it yelled out in pain, she strafed around it and stabbed at its side. A sizzle came as the two blades met once more but so did another yelp, the Jedi keeping the advancing Nightfeller in the firing line of its comrade as much as possible. As it gasped out in pain once more, its concentration finally broke and the Zeltron slashed downwards, finally cutting into flesh. She followed up seamlessly with an upward flick. The red saber deactivated as the lifeless eyes of the Nightfeller stared at her before its body fell apart.

The lone Nightfeller cried out a feral scream and finally retreated, disappearing from view and in the Force. Aura looked around her, waiting for a killing strike. Several heartbeats went by until

finally she took the chance and spoke into her comlink once more.

“Red 1, landing strip clear for now, but more will be coming. Much more. Hurry.”

*ETA 1 minute. Be ready to board.*

The Zeltron breathed in and out once and then finally returned to the barn. She could already feel several packs of much more potent enemies coming her way. She touched the ground briefly for a few seconds and reached out to the Living Force. As it went inside her, she could feel her energy come back to her and her breathing eased.

*Thank you,* she said wordlessly to the Force.

Aura whistled as she stood up and the younglings came towards her in a hurry, standing behind her. The Jedi activated her saber once more, on edge since the last Nightfeller got away. Meanwhile, the others drew ever closer. She could start to see their forms in the distance as a small army strode towards her.

*Come on, Come on, Come on...*

She counted the heartbeats as she defended them, the younglings already starting to panic with soft whimpers. The enemy was already climbing the hill in front of the barn when the repulsors of a shuttle touched down behind them. Aura pushed out a hand quickly, blowing open the wooden doors. The Jedi breathed a sigh of relief as the younglings ran into the shuttle as quickly as their legs would let them. The Zeltron was right behind them. All but one youngling was aboard when she felt the Force scream out.

She quickly swung upward as the remaining Nightfeller finally showed itself, stabbing at the small brave boy from earlier. Time seemed to move slowly as the red blade cut towards him. Aura's blue saber met the red and pushed it back but not before the boy cried out. The Jedi quickly pushed him back with the strongest shove she could muster, scooped up the writhing child, and jumped on board.

“Move!”

The pilot took off immediately and went skyward, the Nightfeller staring up maliciously as the army behind him finally got to the barn. The building collapsed at the fury of the invaders, who were denied their spoils for now. Aura breathed a sigh of relief and laid the boy on the ground on the shuttle.

“Shh, it's going to be okay,” she said as she slowly coaxed the child's hands off his wound. He refused. “Emotion yet Peace,” she reminded him.

The child merely cried more but slowly regained his composure after a minute. Finally, he let her

see his wound. It was merely an angry red burn and Aura smiled in relief just a little. I'm going to heal this as best I can. Please stay still. It's okay to fall asleep. You're safe now."

The Jedi closed her eyes and held her hands above the wound, focusing on the Force to knit burned sinews. She could feel the boy faint but he let her help. The Zeltron stayed silent as she healed the boy, the other younglings steadying her during the bumpy ride back to the temple. This was what it meant to be a Jedi. Protecting others and others protecting you.

*May the Force be with us*, thought Aura.