**Am I Mad…**

**By Sith Warlord Andrelious J. Inahj**

**Estle City**

**Selen**

**37ABY**

Andrelious J. Inahj was running a little late for the summit meeting. He had again spent far too long in his personal quarters with his fiancée. The couple had had a long night, mostly playing Sabacc and talking about old times on their home planets, both of which had been destroyed by Imperial superweapons. Inahj felt a great deal of guilt about what his beloved Empire had done to Kooki’s homeworld, but knew deep down that there was nothing he could have done. He had been a young boy of eight at the time: he didn’t even enlist with the Imperial Navy until nearly a decade later.

As he headed to the summit meeting, Inahj slowed for a moment, choosing to take a moment of contemplation on a small durasteel bench. A lot had happened since meeting Kooki. Before he had been cold and distant, not caring about anything bar his own rise to power. Now he cared about her. About the other Journeymen in his care. He regretted much of what he had done, the potential friends he had spurned, and the innocents that he could have left alive.

As the ex-Imperial got up and headed away from the bench, a small bomb that had been planted underneath exploded. Inahj was thrown into a nearby wall by the force of the blast.

*I didn’t even get to say goodbye to Kooki..* the Warlord thought as he felt his life ebbing away.

The prone figure of the Arconan Rollmaster fell to the ground, severely wounded. Within minutes, he would be dead…

**Somewhere**

**“It’s Rollmaster Inahj, Lord Consul.”**

**“Get him to the medbay.”**

**“My darling!”  
  
“Keep Kooki away for now. She shouldn’t see Andrelious like this.”**

**“NO! Our place is by each other’s side!”**

**“Get Atyiru. Get Maaks. We need our best working on this one. Whatever’s happened has left Inahj fighting for his life.”**

The voices echoed in Andrelious’ head. All of them familiar to Inahj, but he did not or could not care. All he wanted to was to get back to Kooki.

The Arconan Rollmaster found himself watching a shuttle flight. He was able to vaguely identify some of the constellations, but knew that he had no hope, especially in the state he was in, to try and identify where he was. His best guess was that he was, for some reason, being flown to the sickbay on the *Eye of the Abyss II*.

A sudden jolt disturbed his thoughts. And he was no longer in the shuttle.

**Unidentified Hangar**

Andrelious sat up, taking in the new scene around him. He was able to establish that he was in the hangar of an Imperial-class Star Destroyer. However the hangar had been damaged. Engineering teams were rushing around, repairing a small breach in the hull. Additionally, a number of medical units had begun to tend to some wounded crew members.

*I can’t be on the Abyss. The ships docked here are TIE Fighters. And literally old TIE/ln models. Not even any Bombers or Interceptors! What the frak’s happening? Is Arcona having some sort of museum visiting? Even the other technology is several decades out of date.* Inahj mused as he fully came to his senses.

“You. You appear to be unhurt. I take it you arrived with the Shuttle?” an Imperial Lieutenant asked.

“I was on a shuttle. But then. I don’t know. I’m sorry.” Inahj responded, regarding the Lieutenant awkwardly. He had only just returned from a mission where had killed many an Imperial. He had infiltrated one of the ships, even masquerading as a loyal officer and being promoted to its Captain for some time. Had this ship not heard that Andrelious was now a traitor? Was it another part of the Empire that had somehow kept hold of older style ships and other weapons of war? Even the most remote sectors had at least some of the newer technology by the Battle of Endor.

As the Warlord stood up, the Lieutenant noticed something on his chest.

“I’m sorry, sir. I didn’t realise that you’re our new Fleet Executive Officer. It seems there was some sort of sabotage in this hangar. If you’d been much closer to the bomb you’d have been done for.”

“Bomb? Another one? I was hit by one back on Selen…” Andrelious stated, briefly remembering what had happened.

“What is Selen, sir? I know of no planet or base that carries that name.”

“You mean I’m not in the Dajorra System anymore? What’s going on? I want to see Kooki, now!” the Rollmaster snapped, reaching down for his favoured lightsaber. To his dismay, he realised that he no longer carried either of his lightsabers. The two E-11s he liked to carry were absent, too, leaving the Warlord unarmed. His connection to the Force appeared unhindered, however, a welcome change after the *last* time he had woken up on an unidentified Imperial vessel.

“Alright. What have you done with my lightsabers? And my blasters, for that matter?” Inahj hissed.

“Sir? Lightsabers have been illegal for over a decade now. You’re claiming you had ownership of a number of them? As for your blasters, I can arrange for some new ones for you,” the Imperial officer answered.

“No! I’ve had my E-11s for a very long time. Take me to the bridge, Lieutenant…” the Sith ordered, realising his apparent subordinate had not introduced himself.

“Quistic, sir. Lieutenant Frinmac Quistic.”

*WHAT? Is this an Alliance ship? Seems that bastard Quistic named his son after himself. How original. Still they’re making a very good job of appearing to be a pre-Yavin Star Destroyer.* Andrelious pondered, remembering his old nemesis. The man before him looked a little old to be a son or relative of the Quistic HE knew, but far too young to be Frinmac himself.

“Very well, Quistic. I don’t know what the frak is going on, but I suggest you watch your step. You’re clearly some sort of relative of ANOTHER Frinmac Quistic, but exactly how you’re connected to that slimy traitor is beyond me at this stage.” Andrelious stated.

“There’s only one other Frinmac Quistic I know, sir. And that is my three-year old son. I hope one day he too will join the Empire,” Frinmac answered.

Andrelious sighed.

“Alright. Game’s up. I can see that someone is pulling a massive prank on me. In fact, it’s got to be a whole lot of you. But the joke’s over. Return my sabers to me. Take me to the bridge. Send Kooki there too. Clearly my fiancée is in on this. You are all to be congratulated. I will blame Atyiru for this. Her and her obsession with smiling,” the Rollmaster said, appearing tired.

“Sir. Who is ‘Atyiru’? And ‘Kooki’? If you are engaged, sir, you’ll know we can’t have family on this ship. Neither my wife nor my son have ever seen more than the hangar bay we just exited. Are you sure you’re feeling alright? Do you want me to take you to sickbay? That explosion must have gotten to you.” Quistic answered.

“I tire of your company. Get back to whatever it is you’re supposed to be doing. Whatever’s going on, I know how to get to bridge on one of these ships.”

Quistic saluted and walked away, his gait that of a well-trained Imperial officer.

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After a short turbolift ride, Andrelious reached the bridge. He quickly stepped out of the lift. Several Imperials regarded him oddly as he breezed past. The Warlord marched to the centre of the bridge.

“I see the bridge is just as nostalgic as the hangar. Credit to the lot of you…where’s the Consul? And where’s Lauraugina, for that matter?” Inahj demanded of the assembled crew members. They were all dressed in immaculately presented Imperial duty uniforms. Even the rank badges were completely correct for every single officer. To even a seasoned observer, the scene was that of a typical Imperial Class Star Destroyer.

A man, a few years younger than Andrelious, was wearing the uniform of a Commander. The Rollmaster assumed him to be to playing the part of the ship’s Executive Officer. After regarding Inahj briefly, the officer saluted the Sith.

*Good. Finally someone to stop this madness. This joke’s gone on a bit too long,* the Sith thought to himself quietly.

“Vice Admiral, sir! It’s good to know that you were unharmed down in the main hangar bay. We’ll have Intel work on identifying the culprit behind that little unpleasant surprise. I’m afraid we took three losses. All good men, too,” the Commander explained, with an accent that indicated he hailed from somewhere in the Core Worlds.

“Get me Emilie Lauraugina. And tell me where the Consul is. Terrorism is no joke.” Inahj snapped in response.

“Sir. Are you SURE you’re feeling alright? We can have the ship’s medteams check you over if you like…” the younger man stated. Andrelious could sense that the concern was real. Now he was not so sure that he was simply the victim of a practical joke. Things were just *TOO* realistic. A quick mind-read of other nearby ‘Imperials’ revealed a single-mindedness he had not felt among the crews of the Arconan Navy’s ships.

“I..yes, I’m fine, Commander. Whatever’s happening to me is happening for a reason. Tell me something. What ship is this? What’s our current operational status?” Andrelious asked, rubbing his temples as if to get rid of a headache.

The ship’s Executive Officer started to say something, but then his eyes were drawn inexorably towards the turbolift. Inahj found his own eyes trailing towards the same location. Towards the bridge came two older looking Imperials. One wore the insignia of a Captain, the other an Admiral.

“Admiral and Captain on the bridge!” the Commander cried, saluting his superiors and snapping to attention.

The Captain returned the salute.

“As you were, Commander. Welcome to the *Zathura,* Vice Admiral Inahj. I’m glad to see that you were unhurt by that little subterfuge in the hangar. I assure you that we’ll catch whoever was behind it.”

“*Zathura?”* Andrelious questioned. The very name sent a chill through the Arconan’s spine. The Star Destroyer *Zathura* had been where he had spent the majority of his Imperial service. But he remembered well that it had been ambushed and destroyed by the New Republic. He’d been there for the fateful battle that had seen the end of the Star Destroyer that had served as his home for many years.

“Inahj. Stop playing silly games. You wanted to move up. I’ve heard good things about you from your days in service of the Republic Navy. If I’d known you struggled with even the name of the ship you’re currently standing on, I’d have left you back as Captain of the *Ciarus*. Have you been briefed on our next mission?” the Admiral responded. Inahj noticed two things: a thick Byss accent, and the no-nonsense manner that his apparent superior acted with. He was typical of the Imperial Admiralty. Self-superior and smug towards his subordinates, but able to act the convincing boot licker when his own superior officers were present. The Warlord found himself hating the man, but he was not sure why. It had once been his dream to be part of the echelons of command of the Imperial Navy. Things had not gone that way, but now it appeared that the Force was giving him the chance to lead the life he had once aspired to. The Rollmaster wanted nothing more than to get away, however. To get back to Arcona. To Kooki. To his home.

“Find the ship’s Quartermaster. Have him show you to your office. You’ll find the files you need there on our next mission.”

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Andrelious looked around the office he had been assigned. Clearly the *Zathura* was not the fleet’s flagship as he was using the largest office available. This indicated that he was considered the ranking officer on board the ship. His superior, who he had found out was called Admiral Drent Voltic, would have his office on board another ship, probably one of the two other Star Destroyers that Inahj had noticed flanking the *Zathura*.

Sitting in the large chair behind his desk, the Rollmaster began to peruse his personal messages. The data console before him stated he had five messages, though there appeared to be some sort of glitch with the equipment as it would occasionally flicker to indicate six messages, instead.

*INBOX: Vice Admiral Inahj, Andrelious J.*

*FIVE NEW MESSAGES*

*1: Admiral Voltic, Drent X.: Assignment*

*2: Admiral Voltic, Drent X.: Welcome aboard*

*Mimosa, Kookimarissia: My Love*

*3: Sub-Lieutenant Trackx, Eron T.: Your office*

*4: Imperial Navy Command: New Assignment & Promotion*

*5: Captain Harlef, Xanis V.: Thank You!*

Immediately Andrelious’ eye was drawn to the apparently un-numbered message. Kooki was trying to contact him! He tapped wildly at the female’s message, wondering why it did not carry a number, and why the system was having difficulty recognising it.

*My Darling Andrelious,*

*I love you. I’m not going to leave your side until you get out of this. Legorii and the DIA are investigating into what happened. They hope to have some answers soon. I’m not the only one here. Atyiru has been instructed to do everything she can. And you know what she’s like. Keep strong, my love. For me. For Arcona. It won’t be home without you.* *You’re a strong one. A bomb won’t be enough to fell you. Or destroy the love we have for each other.*

The message kept fading in and out, making it incredibly difficult to read and comprehend. Its text was confusing. So there HAD been a bomb. And apparently Kooki, as well as Atyiru, were with Andrelious. So why could he not even sense them?

Hastily, the Warlord pushed the ‘reply’ button.

*Kooki!*

*I can’t see or hear you. I’m stuck on some Star Destroyer. The weird thing is that it’s the Zathura, darling! The ship I used to serve on. It’s like I’m on some sort of ghost…*

The message that Inahj was typing suddenly vanished, being replaced by a system message that threatened to break the Warlord’s heart.

*Recipient Mimosa, Kookimarissia was not found.*

Desperately, the Sith tried again. Only to receive the same error message.

“Let’s try someone else. This thing is the key to getting back.” Andrelious said, knowing no-one else could hear him.

*Recipient Entar, Atyiru was not found.*

*Recipient Araave, Atyiru was not found.*

*Recipient Erinos Arconae, Nadrin was not found.*

*Recipient Legorii was not found.*

Whatever Arconan Inahj tried appeared to not exist, at least not on the system. He tried new and old names, allies and even those he was not so close to. Sighing, the Rollmaster gave up, reading the other messages instead. These messages were displayed correctly, with full sender information that had not been present on Kooki’s message. The oldest message was from a man called Harlef. He had apparently been the first officer of the Star Destroyer *Ciarus*, which had, according to him, been under Andrelious’ command. Harlef personally thanked Inahj for being more than a Captain. He had been a friend, too. Even in the message itself, Harlef apologised for his very ‘un-Imperial’ goodbye, blaming his now ex-superior and saying ‘his ways had rubbed off’ onto him.

The next messages were fairly standard. A message from High Command informing his application had been successful and he was now Executive Officer of the 55th Battlegroup, and a message from the ship’s Quartermaster detailing his new office. The name Trackx seemed familiar, but Inahj couldn’t understand why.

The two most recent communiques were from Admiral Voltic. Andrelious decided to read these more carefully. From what he had met of Voltic so far, he seemed to be a stuffy, by-the-book sort of officer. Much like most Imperials had been before the horrors of Endor.

*From: Admiral Voltic, Drent X.*

*Subject: Welcome Aboard*

*Received: 29:6:30*

*Vice Admiral Inahj,*

*Welcome to the 55th Battlegroup. As I’m sure you are aware, you will be acting as Executive Officer from the Star Destroyer Zathura. I myself will command the fleet from my chosen flagship, the Star Destroyer Invincible. I will head over to the Zathura shortly to meet you personally. I will expect to see you rein Captain Piart and his first officer in. They’re a little more undisciplined that I would like.*

*Admiral Drent X. Voltic*

*Commander, 55th Battlegroup*

The date in the message was of great interest to Inahj. According to it, it was 29 years after the Great Resynchronisation. By the modern calendar, it was 6 years before the Battle of Yavin. It was the year that Inahj moved to Byss. He was sure it was significant for another reason too, but couldn’t recall exactly why. Pondering this for a few moments, Andrelious moved on to the newest message.

*From: Admiral Voltic, Drent X.*

*Subject: Assignment*

*Received: 29:6:32*

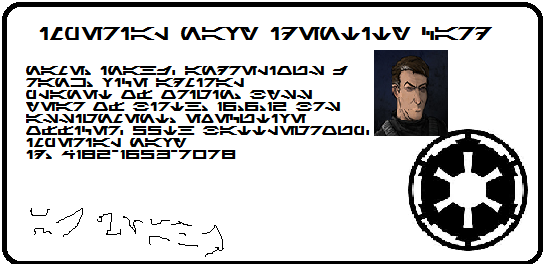
*Vice Admiral Inahj*

*High Command have given us our next assignment. The 55th Battlegroup is to patrol the systems around Alderaan. The Invincible and Zathura, as well as their escorts, will be deployed to Alderaan itself. I’m sure you’ve heard rumours that Viceroy Organa is involved with some sort of plot against the Emperor. As you appear to have suffered some shock from the recent sabotage attempt in the hangar, I’ve spared you the trouble of briefing Captain Piart. But if you’re not up to scratch by tomorrow, I’m sending you back to Imperial Centre. Do I make myself clear, Inahj?*

*Admiral Drent X. Voltic*

*Commander, 55th Battlegroup*

The content of the message was of great distress to Andrelious. It appeared he really WAS back in time. He searched the pockets of the uniform he had on, hoping that his hipflask had made the journey back too. All he could find was an Imperial ID card.



On reading the card, Inahj was baffled. The name was indeed his, as was the picture. Even the signature was accurate. But the rest of the information was inaccurate. It claimed he had actually been born on Byss, and his date of birth was now apparently 16 years before the Great Resynchronisation. In ‘modern’ terms, that placed his ‘new’ birth an incredible 51 years before Yavin.

The Warlord checked his chrono. It had been a very long day, both back on Selen and now apparently on the *Zathura*. He would figure out what was happening to him over the course of the next few days. That was, if he was still around in the next few days. Though he had not recognised any former colleagues, Andrelious hadn’t ruled out the idea that the ‘ship’ he was now on was acting as his ‘afterlife’. The theory certainly made sense, the *Zathura* having been destroyed many years ago. He was sure, however, that his prowess with the Force would have allowed him to project some sort of continued presence in the ‘real’ world. For now all he could do was use the Force passively, using it to read minds and manipulate others in silence. If, however it had happened, he WAS on a pre-Rebellion era Star Destroyer, use of his more overt powers may result in his arrest and execution.

Dozens of possibilities still swum around the Rollmaster’s mind as he made his way to bed. The quarters he had been provided were far in excess of those that had been assigned to him the ‘last time’ he had been on the *Zathura*, but were nothing when compared to the lodgings that he was entitled to as part of Arcona’s summit. And of course, he did not have his fiancée joining him. For once the occasional snoring that he had been accused of lately would go unnoticed.

As he settled into his bed, Andrelious felt the ship lurch slightly as it entered hyperspace. Clearly it was on the way to Alderaan. To some, sleeping while mid-hyperjump was difficult. To a seasoned veteran like Inahj, it was mere child’s play. Slowly but surely, the Sith Warlord succumbed to his own weariness.

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A sudden noise woke Andrelious with a start. He sat bolt upright in bed, immediately regretting doing so as the metallic headboard dug into his back. He peered around, noticing that the *Zathura* had appeared to return to realspace. He peered at his timepiece, but found it was damaged. To his horror, he realised his whole arm was covered in a grotesque series of burns. He reached out with the Force desperately, trying to heal the burnt flesh. He soon felt the warmth of his powers undoing what had been done to him, but the burns weren’t disappearing.

*But I should be able to heal this sort of thing easily.* Inahj thought to himself, starting to panic a little as his continued attempts to treat his wounds failed. Again and again he tried. The Force told him it was working, but his other senses contradicted that. Still he could see the burning. Still he could feel it.

The Warlord began to feel desperation building. If he was now awake, where was Kooki?

“KOOKI!!” Inahj yelled, not caring who heard.

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Andrelious peered around the room. The *Zathura* had apparently resumed its hyperjump. The burning that he could feel on his arm was gone, and a quick check verified that not only was the arm completely clear of any burning or scarring, but also that his chrono was working again. It was as if he had just had a nightmare. But even the visions that the Force gave him were not that vivid.

It was then that the Warlord noticed a protocol droid had entered his quarters. It slowly made its way towards the ‘Vice Admiral’.

“Vice Admiral Inahj. I am Imp-12. Your new protocol droid,” the automaton stated emotionlessly.

Inahj furrowed his brow in confusion.

“I did not send for a droid. Explain at once what you’re doing here.”

“Sir. According to my databanks, you have a preference for a droid to record your logs and thoughts. As your old droid was unfortunately destroyed in an accident on board the *Ciarus* shortly prior to your promotion, I was sent to replace it,” the droid replied, its automated voice effortlessly explaining the situation.

Andrelious usually hated the artificial precision of droids. In his view, perfection was learned and obtained by those who had the knowledge and the power to do so. Droids were seen as little more than mechanical helpers. However, seeing a droid right now actually brought the Warlord a little relief. He realised that he could tell it his feelings over what was happening. There were thousands of men on board the *Zathura*, but Inahj could not trust a single one. The few that he had mentioned his situation to had attempted to send him to the Star Destroyer’s sick bay, fearing some kind of mental illness or madness had gotten to their ‘superior’.

“Very well. First of all, I have a task for you. Let’s see how good your databanks are. Who am I and what is my background?” Andrelious questioned. He reasoned that the droid was a construct of wherever he was. It would know everything about the person he had become. Information that was elusive to the ‘Vice Admiral’.

“Your name is Andrelious Jongstram Inahj. You are serving as Executive Officer for the Imperial Navy’s 55th Fleet, currently on assignment to patrol the Alderaan sector. You hold the rank of Vice Admiral. Your previous assignment was as Captain of the Star Destroyer *Ciarus*. You were born 16 years before the Great Resynchronisation, on the planet known to the Galactic Empire as Byss,” Imp-12 reeled off, the facts being given as a list rather than as a coherent speech.

“Tell me more, droid. Who are my parents? Also find all records you can on the name ‘Mimosa’. Check families from Alderaan and Corellia.” Inahj commanded.

“Imperial records do not show your parents, sir. All the relevant file indicates is that you were found abandoned as a baby. That information is also marked as ‘highly upsetting’. Are you sure you want me to continue?”

The Warlord appeared to struggle to digest the information.

*What in the name of Palpatine? Abandoned? My parents are alive and well. At least back in the ‘real world’. Right now they’d be living on Dantooine. It was this year that we moved to Byss. Perhaps this place only has versions of people who have died. Why it’s running so far behind reality is anyone’s guess.*

“Very well. Now, do the search I ordered. Anyone called Mimosa on Alderaan or Corellia,” the Sith demanded.

*Wait. Mimosa was her father’s name. I remember that it was her MATERNAL grandparents on Corellia. What was their name?*

“Sir. Two hundred and twenty-two million, eight hundred and twenty five thousand and six hundred and forty-eight family matches for Mimosa on Alderaan. Are you sure you want me to search for the same name on Corellia?” the droid questioned. Such was the population of Alderaan that even the relatively uncommon ‘Mimosa’ surname was far too popular to be reasonably searched through.

Andrelious stared thoughtfully out of one of the transparisteel windows. The blue swirls of hyperspace had always helped him concentrate during periods of deep thought.

“No. Search for anyone called Myflax. Marissia Myflax. Let’s be a bit more specific, Imp-12.”

The droid delved into its memory banks, coming up with the answer moments later.

“Twenty-five people called Marissia Myflax on Corellia. I believe that’s a more reasonable number for you to search through,” Imp-12 stated.

“Ok. Thank you. Upload that information for me. I’ll have a look later. Now go and make sure your datafiles are up to date. I may have further for you later.”

*Alright. So it appears her grandmother is alive. It’s a shame I’ve never asked about her grandfather’s name – if this truly is six years before Yavin, he’ll still be alive too. It won’t be long after Kooki’s mother left. I’ll assume that official records have her down as Tabithia – if I remember correctly, Kooki told me her parents had some trouble with the Imperials of the day not long after she was born. Something about non-standard names.* Inahj mused, recalling a conversation he had had with his fiancée.

Andrelious began to sort through the information that his droid had provided him with. He ruled out the first three matches; two were too old, and the other was far too young. He was about to study the fourth match when his door entry system buzzed. The console switched to its security mode which indicated that it was Captain Piart. Inahj approved the Captain’s entry.

Piart entered the office in the fashion that Andrelious remembered was common upon Imperial officers. He walked briskly up to his superior’s desk and saluted smartly.

“Sir. I just thought I’d let you know that we’re headed to the Dantooine system first. The system authorities have requested further assistance in dealing with a pirate problem that is plaguing the whole sector,” he announced, his tone not much less devoid of emotion than the droid that had left a few minutes previously.

“Very well, Captain. Will the rest of the fleet be joining us? I’m sure we don’t need more than one Star Destroyer to sort out a few pirates.”

Piart looked unsure how to answer. Andrelious looked directly at the Imperial Captain, probing into his thoughts with the Force.

*I’m having my doubts about this Inahj. His record indicates that he prefers to only go into combat when the odds are much more stacked in his favour. And yet he’s before me certain that our ship alone is enough against pirates we know little about.*

“Sir, we will be accompanied by the entire fleet. I know that some would consider that overkill, but these are dangerous times. Besides, what’s the worst that can happen? It’s not like these Star Destroyers will ever be used against us,” the Captain answered, this time a little crossly.

“Naval doctrine would state that one Imperial class would be more than adequate, Captain. If the pirates are this well supported to require multiple ships of the line, then sector command would need to be informed. This is page one material, Captain. Just how long have you been in this job?” Inahj stated, sensing his subordinate’s anger.

“I’ll have you know, *SIR*, that I too served with the Republic Navy. I’ve commanded this ship since the day it was flown out of the Kuat Drive Yards. I check the manual every single time that High Command deign to change it. Overwhelming force is the way to go. I’d understand entirely if there were multiple threats, but the rest of the sector is virtually entirely clear.” Piart declared, his resentment towards the slightly older Human growing.

“But by facing even a small group of pirates with our entire forces, we’re risking losing multiple Imperial class ships, not to mention the dozens of support vessels. And think of the losses, man! We can’t replace hundreds of thousands of men! Our recruitment pool is limited!” Andrelious snapped back.

“Sir? We have thousands of millions just in our academies alone. Even if your notion that an Imperial class Star Destroyer can be overwhelmed by a few pirates is to be taken seriously, even the losses of a total defeat would be replaced within days.”

“Of course. I’m sorry, Captain. The Rebellion hasn’t started up yet. This class of ship is still seen as invulnerable, at least for another five years or so,” the Rollmaster replied, backing down as he realised that the doctrine he was preaching was from a time when the Empire was defeated and shrinking, not ascendant and growing.

“Rebellion, sir? Are you saying that there’s a galaxy-wide movement against His Majesty?” the Captain queried, his concern obvious.

“Not at this time, Captain. But there will be. I’ll prepare a thesis on what to expect. Given I’m likely stuck here I might as well make this timeline turn out a little more favourably for the Empire than what I’m used to.” Inahj stated.

“I’ll, er, look forward to it. For now, sir, I’m needed on the bridge. I trust you will join me shortly? Admiral Voltic is one for running an operation to the letter. I doubt he’d tolerate too much of the slackness that you’re occasionally known for.” Piart declared, saluting and turning to leave.

“Go, Captain. I’ll be with you shortly.”

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Andrelious began his own journey towards the bridge. A mere few minutes had passed since the *Zathura’s* Captain had left his office, but the Warlord knew that Piart had deep reservations about him – and he did not blame him. From what he could find of his own records, he’d apparently served with distinction on the Star Destroyer *Ciarus*, demonstrating a knack for turning situations around. The files also indicated that he was popular among his men, with morale on the *Ciarus* among the highest in the fleet. There was no reason indicated for this, so Inahj could not dig futher into it. He suspected that such files existed but would only be readable by Voltic and other superiors.

The files on Voltic were even more tight-lipped. All they could tell the Arconan was that Drent Voltic had served with honours during the Clone Wars. He was among the first few to be given command of the new Imperator Class Star Destroyers, as the ‘Imperial Class’ had been known on their creation. Andrelious had always preferred the name Imperator Class, thinking ‘Imperial Class’ seemed a little too ‘Rebel’ in origin. Besides, what good was calling a ship Imperial class if it was fighting AGAINST the Imperials, a fate which befell many of the Star Destroyers after the dust from Endor had settled.

Inahj arrived on the bridge. It was still an unusual sight for the Arconan – even in his time serving as a pilot trips to the bridge had been virtually unheard of, even during his time as Commander of Nu Squadron. It was only once he became an established part of Clan Arcona was he even allowed on the bridge of the *Eye of the Abyss II*, a ship that was run in a vastly different way to either the *Zathura* that Andrelious had served on, or the *Zathura* that he was now ‘trapped’ on.

A young human with the rank insignia of an Ensign saluted the arriving Sith.

“Sir. We’ll drop out of hyperspace in one minute,” he declared eagerly, returning his gaze to the status monitor that he was reading. Other officers were reading similar monitors, whilst others appeared to be preparing for the end of the hyperjump.

*Right. Let’s make sure we rout these pirates. I’ll hit them with what I know. I doubt Voltic will be impressed, but stuffiness in the Admirality is typical of the era.* Inahj mused as the seconds counted down.

“Captain. What support forces do we have? I’ve not had chance to ask you,” the Rollmaster asked, realising that information still escaped him.

“Sir. As you know we are one of three Imperial class ships, the *Invincible* and *Unfathomable.* There are also six Victory class Star Destroyers and four Dreadnaughts for heavy support. Our fighters will be supported by the *Breaker* CR-90 Corvette squadron.” Piart replied.

“We’re back in real space, sir! I detect six squadrons of Z-95 Headhunters and three squadrons of Y-Wings headed our way!” the Ensign that had previously addressed Andrelious called out, translating what appeared to be little more than dots into usable information.

“Launch three TIE squadrons. Tell the others to be ready. They’re in reserve.” Inahj ordered.

“Sir? We’d be expected to launch all TIEs. I’m sure the other ships are already doing the same.” Piart declared. Andrelious stared in the Captain’s general direction.

*He’s an idiot. But I’d be equally foolish to question him. I’ll just let the Admiral deal with his tactical failure after the battle.*

“If we launch everything, Captain, what are we left with if it turns out that our enemy is holding more in reserve? Do you really want to risk being caught without any TIEs?” Inahj snapped, annoyed at the man’s ‘unheard’ disrespect.

Sure enough the rest of the 55th Battlegroup launched their entire fighter complement. The *Zathura*’s three squadrons formed up with their colleagues from the other ships. The fighters became engaged in a brutal furball with the Headhunters, with a few hanging back to pick off the Y-Wings.

The battle appeared to be going well for the Imperials. Quickly the numbers of Z-95s were whittled down, though with more than a handful of TIE Fighters also falling to the pirates. They had adopted the tactic of ramming the TIEs, knowing that the flimsy starfighters would come of second best in any collision. Meanwhile the Y-Wings were mostly dealt with, though two Corvettes had been destroyed and a Dreadnaught was badly damaged, all by torpedo fire.

The bridge of the *Zathura* had become a hive of activity. Crewmen scurried about, whilst Andrelious and Captain Piart observed the battle from the front of the bridge. The nature of the battle had meant that the Star Destroyer itself had not much of a chance to get involved, though it had fired its heavy turbolasers in the general direction of the enemy.

“Sir. There is an unidentified shuttle en route to Dantooine. It’s being pursued by a couple of Y-Wings. I think they’re trying to disable it!” a voice came from somewhere in the ‘pit’ of the bridge.

“It’s hailing us now. I think they need assistance!” another voice cried.

“Put it through. Let’s see if they’re worth saving.” Piart commanded.

Andrelious was almost disinterested in the plight of the shuttle, though he was a little irked that Piart would actually consider endangering its passengers if they were not of sufficient value to the Empire.

“This is Shuttle *Tsebs’itsaerb.* We need assistance, please help us, Imperials!” the shuttle’s pilot broadcast.

Inahj nearly fell over when he heard the pilot’s voice. The name of the Shuttle, too, rang a massive bell. *Tsebs’itsaerb* was the name of his father’s original shuttle! By the time that he could remember, however, it had been replaced by a newer ship, the *Tsebs’itsaerb II*. The fate of the original had been something that Andrelious had questioned when still a fairly small child.

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Parck Inahj sighed. His five year old son had been badgering him for some time over the same old topic. He’d tried many a time to make it clear that that particular subject was a painful one for him to talk, but the young boy would not listen.

“It’s not important, Andrelious. Let’s just say that the day we got the new ship was the day we moved to Byss.”

“But daddy! It must be a fascinating story!” Andrelious answered, dissatisfied at his father’s attempts at evasion. He knew there was more to it. Both Parck, and his mother, Licon, always acted nervously when the five year old probed into what had happened three years previously.

“I’ll do you a deal. Stop asking me these annoying questions, and I’ll let you have a play on my old simulator. Ok?” Parck pleaded, hoping his attempted bribery would be enough to distract the child from his current interest.

“Can I go on it now?” the younger Inahj responded, his obsession with the recent past overcome with his zeal to fly.

The questions ceased.

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“I want two squadrons on that shuttle. Make sure it gets to our hangar in one piece. They’ve been caught in the crossfire so be sure to take good care of the passengers while they are here,” the Rollmaster ordered, now almost obsessed with making sure the shuttle was safe.

Two dozen TIE Fighters peeled off from the battle and gave chase to the pair of Y-Wings that were harassing the shuttle with ion cannon fire. With such an immense difference in odds, the Y-Wings were dispatched without much trouble. The TIEs moved into a defensive pattern around the shuttle.

The rest of the battle continued in earnest. The Headhunters were reducing in number fairly rapidly as the odds swung more and more in favour of the Imperials, though plenty of TIE Fighters were also destroyed. The Y-Wings were being cut down by accurate defensive laser fire from the Corvettes, who had still lost only two of their number. The number of losses was higher than Inahj would have liked, but a pair of Corvettes and around forty TIE Fighters would be considered a fairly good performance. Certainly the way the rest of the *Zathura’s* command crew acted indicated that the losses were deemed to be acceptable.

“Sir. Something most curious. That shuttle’s landed in our hangar. The pilot appears to be called Parck Inahj. Is he a relative of yours? I can send him to your office…” an Ensign declared, having received word from the hangar that the *Tsebs’itsaerb* had successfully reached the Star Destroyer’s primary hangar bay.

“I’ll meet him the hangar. Was anyone with him?” the ‘Vice Admiral’ inquired.

“His wife and young son. I don’t think they gave their names. Should they?”

“No, Ensign. They’re no threat. Leave them be and make sure that Lieutenant Quistic does as well.” Inahj commanded.

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A short time later, Andrelious was ready to meet with his father. He was worried that the family resemblance would be spotted, as he had denied any connection to the owner of the shuttle. Trying to explain that a man who was currently younger than he was was actually his father would have likely given Piart the chance to have his newly installed superior committed to sick bay on grounds of stress induced temporary insanity.

It had been some time since the Rollmaster had seen his father. The elder Inahj was not aware of his son’s relationship with Kooki, or the fact that his son was soon going to marry the Alderaanian. The Warlord deliberately concealed his dealings in the Brotherhood from both his parents, though he suspected his mother was at least partially aware of what he was up to – she too was able to use the Force, though to this day Andrelious did not know the extent of her abilities.

On arrival in the hangar, the Arconan noticed that his ‘father’ was in a conversation with a technician who was repairing some damage to the Inahj family’s spacecraft. The Y-Wings had apparently done enough with their ion cannons to leave the shuttle needing some repairs.

Cautiously, Andrelious approached, wishing to overhear rather than disrupt the conversation.

“It is old. But you’re talkin’ to an Imperial engineer, sir. We’ll ‘ave your ship back in the air shortly,” the technician stated in an accent that sounded a little more ‘low brow’ than the majority of the officers on board. It was well known throughout the Empire, even by the time that Andrelious had enlisted, that officer status was usually only afforded to those who had the connections or the money for it. All others were shoved into whichever pigeon hole suited them the best, as had happened with Andrelious and his assignment as a TIE pilot. In this world, though, it appeared he had made it as an officer, despite apparently having no parents to speak of.

“Will I owe you anything for the job?” Parck Inahj asked, noticing but not greeting Andrelious.

The Warlord of the Sith fought back the temptation to welcome his father warmly. He was already under suspicion for having ‘issues’, and the apparent Vice Admiral knew full well that he would be under surveillance. Imperial Intelligence had agents everywhere, even before the Rebellion, and the Arconan suspected that some or all of the ‘technicians’ milling about were listening to every word and watching every action.

The arrival of Parck shook Andrelious. He was certain that his parents were still alive, so he began to rule out the possibility that he was in some kind of afterlife. The fact that nobody else seemed to question the reality of the situation troubled him greatly. Perhaps the Force was testing him? Seeing how he reacted in certain scenarios.

*Ok. So if this is the Force’s doing, perhaps I’m closer to life than I thought. But what now? Am I expected to react a certain way to what’s being presented to me? I’ll assume doing the ‘right’ thing will mean the Force allows me home, but, what is the ‘right’ thing to do here?* Inahj thought to himself, desperately searching his memory for anything from his early childhood.

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Licon Inahj entered her abode’s living room, having put her young son Andrelious to bed. It had been a long day and the toddler had dropped off quickly for a change.

“That altercation with the pirates was the final straw, Parck. We’re moving. I’m sorry to make such a drastic decision, but this planet is no place to raise a young boy. Let’s take him to that planet that was mentioned when we were on that Star Destroyer. One of the officers gave me its coordinates. Apparently if we move soon we’ll be given a substantial grant towards finding new lodgings,” she said fairly matter-of-factly.

Parck knew there was no arguing with his wife when she made a decision. Since renouncing her use of the Force, particularly the dark side, Licon was rarely forceful, happy to discuss with her beloved as to what the best course of action was.

“Alright. It was called Byss, wasn’t it? I’m sure that I can get a decent sum for this place. I’d still like to retire back home to Corellia one day, though. Maybe catch up with my old friends. It’s been far too long since we’ve been there. But that’s a discussion for another time. Our little Andrelious will be much safer on a world such as Byss. No piracy there. No crime,” he responded.

On hearing his name, the young Andrelious scuttled back to bed, thinking his father had caught him. He did not know what ‘Byss’ or ‘Corellia’ were, but something told the 2-year old that they were important to him.

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“Sir?” a voice said, jolting Andrelious out of his flashback. He realised that both his father and the engineer were staring at him.

“Brief me on the situation.” Inahj replied, trying to appear as unfazed as possible.

“This is a Parck Inahj. ‘e and ‘is family own the shuttle that was brought in. I told ‘im that if ‘e were lucky that you or one of the other ‘ighups would provide him with a little ‘elp to get back to the planet,” the engineer stated, his accent grating on Andrelious with every single word.

“Alright. You get back to working on the *Tsebs’itsaerb*. I’ll deal with the diplomatic side of the situation…”

“I knew you Imperials were good, but I’ve never known anyone be able to state my ship’s name AND pronounce it correctly on their first go.” Parck declared.

“I spent my childhood on this ship’s successor. Of course I know how to pron-“ Andrelious began, silencing himself. The man before him, as much as he *looked* and *sounded* like his father, was effectively an imposter. The only son this Parck had was two years old, and was obviously neither a Warlord of the Sith nor a Vice Admiral.

*I’m here to make sure my father gets to Byss. Or perhaps the Force wants to me to STOP him from taking my younger self to Byss. No doubt I’d turn into some horrible light side abomination if I’d not spent years on that dark side soaked hell hole. One thing I definitely SHAN’T do is try to explain what’s going on here. I wonder if my ‘mother’ can sense who I am. Perhaps the Force has altered my imprint too?*

“So, judging by that rank insignia, you’re in charge? What can I call you?” Parck questioned. Andrelious smiled. His father had always had an awkward respect for Imperials, trying to be polite but often coming off quite rude. That was why the younger Inahj had not invited his parents to his graduation from the Imperial Academy.

“Vice Admiral I..Entar.” Andrelious answered, deciding quickly to take an alias. At this point in the time the Entar name would be totally unknown. Half of the ‘family’ as he knew it were still years away from being born, let alone inducted.

“My ship’s nearly ready to go, Vice Admiral. However I’d like you to know that I’m very grateful of the help you, and your ship have given me today. Without your presence I’d hate to think what would have happened. Licon, could you come here a second?”

A woman dressed mostly in black arrived from the guts of the shuttle. She was carrying a toddler. She regarded Andrelious for a second, just long enough for the Warlord to ponder if she recognised him. As he prayed to the Force that she wouldn’t, she smiled at him, before turning to Parck. This female was the Rollmaster’s mother. And that meant, she was carrying..*him.*

Andrelious could not take his eyes off his younger self. The 2 year old Andrelious looked tired, but at the same time incredibly excited. When he noticed the ‘Vice Admiral’ regarding him, he too smiled in his direction, utterly thrilled.

“Mummy, big man smiled!” he said. The elder Andrelious could not remember a time in his childhood when he had been so bubbly. All he could remember was being an obedient child of two loyal Imperial citizens, proud to be part of an Empire but also somehow unsatisfied. Truly, the nature of Byss had crushed his spirit – before then he had been a happy child.

“Are we about ready to leave, Parck? Andrelious is getting bored. There’s only so many times I can tell him about the knobs and switches on the control panel. He’s nearly ejected me through the roof twice as it is!” the female stated, clearly immensely tired from the day’s events.

Licon turned to ‘Entar’.

“You in charge of this ship?” she asked simply.

The Warlord opened his mouth to answer, but was silenced by a familiar voice in his head. The female Inahj was communicating with him via the Force.

*I don’t know who you are, or what you are, but I know you don’t belong here. You’re from a long way away. I can tell that you’re missing someone immensely. And that you too can touch the Force. I’d keep that quiet if I were you. The Imps don’t like it too much*.

The elder Andrelious stared back at the woman he recognised as his mother.

*Take Parck. Take little Andrelious. Get off Dantooine, it’s not safe. Get to Byss. I’ll give you and your husband the coordinates. I can’t tell you who I am. Just trust me,* he ‘replied’, surprised that the Sith woman hadn’t actually figured it out. Perhaps the Force was masking who he was?

“This is Vice Admiral Entar. He’s… actually I don’t think he ever told me whatever it is he does. Just his name and rank. Not even given me his serial number.” Parck chuckled.

The Rollmaster smiled. He had heard from his mother that his father had once possessed a keen sense of humour before the days that they lived on Byss. Now he had seen that for himself he began to realise just how much of an effect the Emperor’s throneworld had had on the entire Inahj family.

“I shan’t keep you any longer, Mr Inahj. You and your family have had a long day. However, I would like to ask you to consider relocating from Dantooine. I shouldn’t be telling you this but I’ve heard that these pirate attacks will continue for some time. I’d hate to see you lose a ship as beautiful as the *Tsebs’itsaerb*. Wouldn’t it be nice to pass it on to your son one day?” the Warlord asked.

“Moving, especially as a trader, is difficult. It could take me years to re-establish my contacts!” Parck protested.

“Go to these coordinates. You’ll find a planet there that’ll be most welcoming for all of your skillsets. Just make sure you get off there in around ten years’ time. Things get a little explosive after that.” Andrelious stated assertively.

“Mummy. Impy says Byss,” added the 2-year-old Andrelious, apparently also aware of the telepathic conversation that his older self and his mother had shared.

“Byss, eh? I’ll give it some thought. Thank you, Vice Admiral. Give your thanks to your crew. I’m going to head out now.” Parck declared, leading his wife and son back into the belly of the shuttle. Moments later, the ship was preparing to launch.

Andrelious smiled as he watched from a safe distance.

*There. Job done. Now hopefully the Force will release me from this situation and I can get back to Kooki.*

As he smiled at the thought of returning to his fianceé, the hangar’s lighting began to dim.

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**“His Force imprint is dwindling. I think we’re losing him.”**

**“No! Please, Master, there must be something more you can do.”**

**“Kooki, dear, he’s lasted a lot longer than most as it is. Just the force of the blast from that bomb would have killed either of us outright. Perhaps if he were an elder….”**

**“I thought you never gave up on a patient!”**

Andrelious could hear two voices from somewhere in the darkness. He quickly recognised them as Atyiru and Kooki.

“Kooki! I don’t know where I am but I’m going to get back to you!” the Warlord yelled, peering into the blackness in an attempt to find his beloved. He could vaguely sense her presence, and that of the Galeres Aedile, with the Force, but was unable to find either of them in the flesh.

The lighting began to re-illuminate. Inahj noticed that a new ship had landed. As he watched, the shuttle’s hatch opened, revealing Admiral Voltic.

Andrelious stood immediately to attention, remembering Imperial protocol perfectly. He snapped a quick salute at the Admiral. He then noticed a number of Stormtroopers and officers were filing him, as was typical when a ranking officer arrived.

*They were already beginning to gather when the lights went off, yet none of them show any sign of having noticed what happened. Did they just disappear when I heard Kooki and Atyiru talking? Hopefully they didn’t hear me yelling, anyway. Half this ship already think I’m a madman without them having heard that,* the Rollmaster thought to himself as he waited for his superior to greet him.

“At ease, Inahj.” Voltic commanded.

“What brings you back to the *Zathura*, sir?” Andrelious questioned, allowing himself to move into a more relaxed stance.

“I think we should head to your office. We have a little to discuss,” the senior Imperial replied bluntly.

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After a short turbolift journey, Andrelious arrived at his office, Admiral Voltic following him closely. The two Imperial officers entered the room silently – they had not exchanged a single word since leaving the hangar. It was only when the pair sat down did the conversation begin.

“I’m sure you have an idea for why I have come here, Inahj.” Voltic stated.

“I wouldn’t even be able to begin guessing, sir. After all we easily routed those pirates, even with the losses that we did take.” Andrelious replied.

“Your decision to hold fighters back goes against Imperial Naval doctrine, Inahj! I’m sure you’re fully aware that you were supposed to launch all TIE squadrons on arrival. I certainly will not expect such sloppiness again. Perhaps your previous superiors were tolerant of actions that deviate so much from official protocol, but I shall not have it. I’m watching you, Inahj,” the Admiral warned.

“Sir, there were already more than enough TIEs in the combat area as it was! What if we’d been caught in a trap? Seventy-two pilots could have ended up dead! Could you live what that?” Inahj answered, equally annoyed.

“Seeing as you’re new to the Admirality, I’ll let this slide. However you need to remember, Andrelious, you’re an Admiral now. The lives of those pilots don’t matter. Nor the lives of those on board the Corvettes. You know as well as I do that only one life matters – that of the Emperor.”

Inahj could not believe what he was hearing. His superior was, in his opinion, responsible for the lives of hundreds of thousands of men. Yet, here he was, declaring that none of their lives mattered. Even as a Sith, and a killer of dozens, the revelation that a man such as Voltic did not care less about those under his command was just too much for Andrelious to take.

“The Emperor’s life won’t matter if we’re left with no-one to serve him. There’s not always going to be a virtually unlimited pool of personnel. Or ships. Just wait and you’ll see,” the Warlord explained coolly.

“It’s not your place to come up with strategy. Your place is to help me lead this fleet. Remember that. But your comments on personnel reminds me that we’ll be stopping off on the way to Alderaan to replenish our losses. That will be left up to the individual ship captains, so you don’t need to worry yourself with such issues. Just get familiarised with the systems surrounding Alderaan. That information will be extremely important.” Voltic ordered.

“I have a little awareness of the area. Though I’ll be most interested to see Alderaan in its original form rather than that of the asteroid field I know of.” Inahj answered, not bothering to conceal his true self.

“Very well. I’ll leave you to your duties. I’ll be on the *Invincible* if you need me.” Voltic declared. Andrelious saluted his superior, who wasted no time in leaving the office.

Once the Admiral had been gone for a few moments, Inahj pushed a button on his desk. Imp-12 appeared from a side-door, and mechanically sidled towards the Sith.

“You have need for me, sir?” the Protocol Droid asked in its monotone voice.

“I’d like to write a short journal entry, Imp-12. Begin recording immediately.” Inahj demanded.

The droid did not answer directly, but a clicking noise from its innards was enough for Andrelious to know that it had obeyed his command. With a moment’s hesitation, the Warlord began speaking.

“My name is Andrelious J. Inahj. I was the victim of a bombing and now I’ve woken up in 6BBY. Am I mad, in a coma, or back in time? Whatever’s happened, it’s like I’m in a different world. Maybe if I can work out why the Force has brought me here, I’ll be able to figure out what I’m supposed to do, and be able to get home.”

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Some time later Andrelious returned to the bridge. As he arrived, Captain Piart greeted him with a smart salute.

“Sir! We will be leaving in ten minutes for supply base DC-193. We will replenish our losses there. As for now, what would you like to be done regarding those that died during the battle? Admiral Voltic’s left that duty up to you.” Piart stated.

*Standard Imperial practice. Send your 2nd in command to bear the bad news to those poor families.* Inahj thought.

“We’ll have a memorial for the losses tomorrow. Have the relevant departments send standard loss apologies to our fallen comrade’s families, and ensure that their pensions are transferred too. That income is vital to a lot of those families.” Andrelious commanded, remembering too many tales of families being made homeless.

“You heard him, Commander. Get it done,” the Captain ordered to his own 2nd.

The *Zathura’s* First Officer saluted and headed away to perform the task, not saying a word.

“One question, sir. I thought that dying in combat meant you forfeited your pension. You’re saying it’s transferred to the family of the deceased?” Piart questioned.

“New policy. I received the message regarding the change only a few days ago. Be careful challenging your superiors, Captain. If you’d tried that with some of the officers I’ve worked with, you’d be looking at ejection. Or if you’re lucky a suicide mission deep into Rebel territory.” Inahj warned with an angry glare towards the Captain.

“I’m sorry, sir. I’ve not been updated as to fleet policy. Should I inform my crew as to the change?”

“No. Just keep them ready. Resupply operations are never simple, Captain. It’s always a chance for the enemy to catch us at our most vulnerable. Just be glad that our Star Destroyer isn’t damaged.” Inahj declared, turning away from Piart. He watched the various crew members perform their tasks with a single-mindedness that was not present among the officers of an Arconan starship. The efficiency was second to none. And yet many fought against this efficiency, this precision, eventually destroying much of it in the name of ‘freedom’.

*Perhaps that why I’m here. I somehow need to stop Endor from happening. Do I really have to wait a decade? Still that would give me time for the Emperor, if he exists here to notice me and put me somewhere where I may be able to make a difference. Maybe even in time to stop some of the bigger mistakes that the Empire made. Such as Alderaan..* Inahj mused, almost mesmerised by just how efficient the crew of the *Zathura* were.

“Sir? Aside from the occasional accident, damage to our Imperial-class Star Destroyers is simply unheard of. The size of the force it would take to even breach our deflector shields is far beyond anything that’s existed since the days of the Clone Wars. Are you suggesting such a force exists?” Piart questioned, slightly snidely.

“You’ll see, Captain. You’ll see ships mustered against us. But they won’t strike our fleets. They’ll wait till we become overconfident, until we spread out and are on our own. Because the confidence in this design just becomes greater and greater even after its flaws are discovered and the enemy works out how to best our TIE designs. It’ll become too late and thousands of Star Destroyers will be lost. And so will the galaxy. Just you wait.” Andrelious warned.

“You know a lot about an enemy that according to all Intel reports don’t even exist. That is unless there’s something you’re not telling us. Perhaps YOU’RE really an Intel agent. Perhaps you’ve been sent because we’re apparently traitors. Well let me tell you, SIR, that my loyalty is absolute. And so is that of my men. We’ll prove this to you again and again if you want. Now I’ll hope this is the end of the matter. I’d hate to have to tell Admiral Voltic that his Executive Officer is causing a problem with morale.” Piart replied threateningly.

“I’ll assure YOU that I’m not with those spooks. As powerful and as conniving as they are, Imperial Intelligence doesn’t plant officers into fleet command roles. Spies don’t make good strategists.” Inahj spat back.

“If you’re not needing me for anything, sir, I have a resupply operation to oversee.”

Andrelious left the Captain to it, choosing to watch as the replacement TIEs were loaded onto the *Zathura* and its companion ships. New Corvettes to replace those that had been lost were moving themselves into formation, and the Warlord could hear various bridge officers chattering away, some even talking about things other than work. The world he was in truly seemed real.

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Once the fleet was fully restocked, Admiral Voltic had ordered the hyperjump. Finally the 55th Battlegroup was heading to the Alderaan System. From there it would disperse a little among the neighbouring systems to best cover the entire patrol area. Andrelious felt more than a little nervous. He had never been to Alderaan before its destruction, having only been eight years old at the time, but knew that the Empire had never been popular there. It, or rather its prominent resident Bail Organa, would eventually be partially responsible for the creation of the Alliance to Restore the Republic. Inahj had considered attempting to have Organa arrested and executed to stop the Rebellion from forming, but ruled it out. As much as he was a known opponent of the Empire, the execution of any Imperial Senator would likely create more dissenting voices than it would snuff out, and would also have made the Alderaanian a martyr, perhaps allowing the Alliance to form sooner and stronger.

“It’ll be a few hours before we get to Alderaan. I’m going to take this chance to get some rest, sir. I suggest you do as well,” Captain Piart declared, moving away before Inahj could answer.

*That’s a good idea. I just hope I don’t find myself in that halfway house again.* Andrelious thought, dreading the concept.

With no time to waste, the ‘Vice Admiral’ headed not to his quarters, but the ship’s cantina. He knew that his presence there would be unusual: the cantinas of a Star Destroyer were usually used more by the lower ranking members of the ship. Andrelious, however, just needed a good drink before bed.

As he arrived, he noticed the bartender was not the generic male human. Instead, a female greeted him with a smile.

“We don’t get many Admirals here! What’ll be, boss?” she asked cheerily.

“Ebla Beer, please. And a way to get home.” Inahj answered, feeling that he had to be polite to this woman.

“That’s all half of the lads ever talk about, is going home! One Ebla coming up!” the female replied, grabbing a bottle of the popular beverage from a refrigeration unit behind her. Opening it with an unseen bottle opener, she handed it to the Arconan with a smile.

Andrelious drank half of the beer immediately, enjoying the taste immensely. It had been the first drink he had had since arriving, almost unheard of for a man who usually carried a large hip-flask of Corellian Brandy or Tihaar.

“Steady, boss! I don’t want to have to carry you to your quarters! People would talk!” the bartender chuckled. Andrelious noticed that he wasn’t able to read her mind with the Force – perhaps she too was a Force user and was blocking him out?

“Hmm. So what happens to you? A ship doesn’t tend to change its cantina staff very often. It’s bad for morale. But I don’t remember you.” Inahj stated, remembering a very different woman who ran the *Zathura’*s cantina in the days he had served there.

“I go where I am needed, when I am needed. Right now I’m needed here. Just like you. You’ll be back with Kooki soon enough,” the female replied.

“Did you say you know Kooki? Who are you?” Andrelious asked desperately, sure that the bartender knew a lot more than she was letting on.

“This is about who you are, Warlord Inahj. I can’t possibly tell you why you’re here, or what you have to do to get home. But trust me, Andrel. You will get home,” came the simple reply.

“Don’t give me that. You’re clearly part of whatever is going on here.” Inahj said a little louder, though trying not to draw any attention to himself.

“Sorry? Boss! You were saying? I was daydreaming!”

Andrelious simply sighed. If the bartender was the key to this mystery, he clearly had to do more to obtain any more information from her. He stared at the dark-skinned female even as she walked away to serve others. He noticed that she spoke to everybody in a similar way, calling even the lower ranked officers ‘Boss’. Such an attitude was typical of the cantina staff on Imperial vessels. The Imperial Navy treated the cantinas as an important part of keeping a crew’s morale up, though it was considered poor practice to purchase more than one or two drinks in a given visit.

Once he had finished his beer, the Arconan set the empty bottle down on the bar and headed to his quarters, worried about what the night’s sleep would bring.

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It had been a long day and Andrelious found himself falling asleep within seconds of clambering into bed. He didn’t even bother to change out of his uniform.

Seconds later he appeared to awaken again. As he sat up in bed, the Warlord looked at his arms, finding them unharmed. He sighed quickly with relief, and turned to take stock of the room. He quickly identified the room as his quarters aboard the *Zathura*.

*Hmm. Maybe a quick drink before I go back to sleep,* Andrelious thought, clambering out of bed and moving towards the small en suite bathroom.

As he glanced at himself in the mirror, he noticed with horror that his reflection was horrifically wounded. Its face was covered in cuts and bruises, and it appeared that the majority of its hair had been burnt off somehow.

Then the reflection appeared to notice him.

“You could have saved yourself from this. You could have sent Parck and Licon to Corellia. You’d never have even heard of the wretched Brotherhood! Now I, or rather you, are laying comatose and at death’s door! If you’d sent them to Corellia, you could have been free of this!” the reflection yelled, banging angrily at the mirror as if it were trapped behind the glass. It continued to rant and rave at the confused Warlord, who was simply unable to understand. How could anything he did here affect his real life?

Andrelious blotted the reflection out by smearing some shaving cream over the mirror. He could steal hear its almost mad rantings, but he could no longer see it. After getting himself a small glass of water, he headed back into his quarters, determined that he would now sleep.

To his horror, the ‘reflection’ was now banging at the transparisteel window. He could still not see it as he had lowered the blinds, but the knocking and shouting was extremely disturbing.

“I’d never have met Kooki!” Inahj yelled, marching over to the window that the banging was resonating from. It was then that he noticed that his two lightsabers were again hanging from his belt.

With a moment’s hesitation, the Sith grabbed one of them and sliced into the transparisteel, desperate to stop the ongoing abuse.

The window shattered. The room’s atmosphere began to vent out violently as alarms indicated a hull breach. Andrelious would soon die of exposure.

But at least the reflection was silent.

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Andrelious awoke. He looked at his chrono. He’d been asleep for several hours. He almost knew that he wouldn’t need to, but he still glanced towards the window he had sabered. There was no sign of any damage, nor was he carrying either of his lightsabers. Clearly the vision he had experienced had been little more than a nightmare, perhaps sent by the Force to taunt him over his choice to send his ‘parents’ to Byss rather than a less corrupted destination such as Corellia. The Warlord pushed a button to raise the blinds, immediately noticing that the *Zathura* had returned to realspace. A quick check of his messages revealed one from Admiral Voltic confirming that the hyperjump was completed and the fleet would mass near Alderaan to receive its assignments – according to Andrelious’ chrono that would be happening in an hour. That gave him plenty of time to prepare for the briefing.

Throwing a fresh uniform on after a quick shave, Inahj left his quarters briskly, heading for the bridge.

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On arrival, Andrelious noticed the bridge was a lot quieter than usual. The majority of the bridge crew, whilst still observing their monitors, were patiently waiting for Voltic’s transmission. Captain Piart and his First Officer saluted Inahj as he arrived. The Arconan returned the salute.

“Status report, Captain,” he ordered.

“We are in position and awaiting our orders. Shall I tell him we’re ready, sir?” Piart queried, sounding as if he wanted to get this briefing over and done with. Andrelious could also sense an air of impatience among Piart and his crew.

“Do it, Captain. I’m sure that you’re eager to get back to work. One day you’ll enjoy these quiet days, because they will become less and less frequent as time goes on.” Inahj replied.

“Inform Admiral Voltic that we’re ready!” the Captain demanded of a crew member. The man quickly did as was asked of him, before listening to the response from his counterpart on the *Invincible*.

Seconds later, a wavering blue hologram of Drent Voltic appeared before Andrelious. All three command officers saluted it.

“Excellent. All of you were ready within half an hour. I’m glad to see that Inahj is starting to instill more discipline into you and your crew, Piart. As for your missions..the *Invincible* and its assigned escort will patrol the outer reaches of the sector. I will be leading that. *Zathura*, you and your escort, under the command of Vice Admiral Inahj, will look after the Alderaan system itself. *Unfathomable,* you’re to patrol the remaining systems. All Captains should find more detailed orders in their personal files. Voltic out,” the commanding officer ordered. As he ended the transmission the hologram faded into nothingness.

“You heard him! Set course for the Alderaan system!” Inahj commanded. The Warlord decided that he was going to examine the orders he had been sent immediately.

*We’ll see if there’s anything else going on.*

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Andrelious logged straight onto his mail system as soon as he had arrived back at his office. The system confirmed that he had 2 new messages. The first, as expected, was from Admiral Voltic. The second, however, had threatened to blow Inahj’s world apart. He immediately pressed to read that message first, as if to make doubly sure that he was not imagining it.

*From: Mimosa, Tabithiamarissia*

*Subject: Greetings, Vice Admiral*

*Received: 29:6:34*

*Greetings, Vice Admiral Inahj.*

*My name is Tabithiamarissia Mimosa. I’m sure you’re wondering how I have access to your private mail address. Let’s just say that’s not all I know about you. I know why you’re really here. Your Admiral friend Voltic may think he knows everything, but I know there’s more to it. I have my contacts, dear Andrelious, which tell me that you can touch the Force. I’d really hope that your colleagues don’t find that out. It may not be in your best interests.*

*As for why I have sought you out, I just wanted to warn you, one Force sensitive to another. There’s a small group splintering off from the Alderaanian Resistance. Apparently they’re planning on designing some sort of bomb that goes off around Force sensitives. This technology sounds ridiculous to me, and I’m sure it would take some time, but be vigilant. Anything could happen.*

*All the best*

*Tabithiamarissia Mimosa*

There was no doubt. This message was from Kooki’s mother. The fact that she was announcing herself as Force sensitive reduced any chance that this was *another* Tabithiamarissia Mimosa to one in billions. The information about a bomb interested Inahj too – such a technology had apparently been developed only months before back in his own world. Was this group responsible for what had happened to him? All of this was far too much of a coincidence. This was the doing of whatever had put him here.

Saving the message and encrypting it, Andrelious opened the message from his superior.

*From: Admiral Voltic, Drent X.*

*Subject: Orders*

*Received: 29:6:34*

*Inahj,*

*I’m putting my trust in you and the Zathura. The Resistance has largely been behaving itself lately but I need you to investigate a recent incident that caused the loss of a Venator-class Star Destroyer. I know this isn’t standard work for a fleet command officer, but I’ve got High Command on my back over this. I want a name by this time next week.*

*Admiral Drent X. Voltic*

*Commander, 55th Battlegroup*

The message from the Admiral was of interest. Andrelious wondered how much of the message had been copied to Piart. The impression he had got of the Captain had been one of a slightly lax but loyal Imperial. An attitude that would probably prevent him from ever advancing much past his current post. Certainly the name did not ring a bell as somebody who would ever go on to be anything stellar. It was likely given Piart’s age that he retired at some point before Inahj was originally assigned to the *Zathura*.

Andrelious readied himself to go back to the bridge, the situation clear in his head.

It was going to be a few interesting days.

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Several days went by without much happening. The *Zathura* operated mainly as a customs vessel, having its TIE squadrons scan anything and everything that went by. The Imperials found very little of note, allowing the vast majority of locals to go about their business. Andrelious was largely leaving Piart and his crew to it, remembering a time in his own career when this sort of assignment was commonplace.

However, on his arrival on the bridge five days into the assignment, the Sith noticed that things were a little more fraught. The Star Destroyer had apparently just captured a suspicious vessel with its tractor beam. The people inside were protesting their innocence furiously, but Piart was convinced that they knew something about the Venator-class vessel that had been destroyed.

Andrelious insisted on dealing with the captured Alderaanians himself. Rather than have them imprisoned, he requested that they be treated as guests, at least until he could establish if they really were guilty, or had just been found in the wrong place at the wrong time. The last thing he wanted was to start hounding innocents: Alderaan was not majorly friendly towards the Empire even at the best of times, and any sort of humanitarian incident would likely only sour relations further.

For the purpose of ‘interviewing’ the passengers, Andrelious sequestered a small office not too far from the hangar.

“Send the first one in, Lieutenant.” Inahj ordered, noticing that it was Frinmac Quistic in charge of ‘looking after’ the Alderaanians.

“They’re insisting in coming in as a family group, sir. Three of them.” Quistic replied.

“That’s fine. Just send them in.”

The Warlord turned to greet his ‘guests’ with a smile.

That was when he recognised them.

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“So you’re saying the Imperials once questioned your family? And when was this?” Andrelious asked.

Kookimarissia Mimosa frowned. She’d casually mentioned an incident involving her family to her fiancé, and it had piqued his curiosity, despite him knowing that that period was one that the Knight did not like to discuss.

“About two months after I was born. My mother and father were no friends of the Empire, but they weren’t stupid. They knew better than to resist.”

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“I hope this won’t take too long, Vice Admiral. Tabby and I just want to get our little Kooki home.” Mostynn Mimosa stated, trying to avoid sounding overly aggressive.

Andrelious could not answer. He was too busy starting at Tabithiamarissia, and then at the baby she was cradling. The resemblance was obvious – ‘Tabby’ looked very much like the 42-year old Kooki that Andrelious knew and loved. Her hair was long and entirely purple, forming an eerily uncanny fit to the descriptions that Kooki had given of her mother.

Baby Kooki began to thrash and whinge a little. Tabithiamarissia stroked her daughter’s hair gently, and, without even bothering to see if Andrelious was looking, started to breast-feed the infant.

“It’s nice to be able to meet you face to face, dear Andrelious. I’ll assume that you read my message?” Tabby queried as the baby satisfyingly slurped at the offered milk.

“What? Oh yes. Thank you for the intelligence, Mrs Mimosa. Now I’m afraid I am going to have to ask you if know anything about the Venator that blew up recently. I’m sure neither of you have any links to the Resistance…I’m sure I’d have been told about that before.” Inahj replied, still struggling to believe he was effectively interviewing his in-laws and his wife to be was little more than a babe in arms.

“Your Intelligence network is pretty good, I’ll admit that. They were right to pull this ship in. One of our fellow passengers, a man called Gobstron, is the one you seek.” Mostynn volunteered.

“This was fairly simple. For what reason are you so happy to betray a fellow Alderaanian?” Andrelious answered quizzically. He had been expecting, almost hoping, for a longer conversation.

“Gobstron may claim he’s a freedom fighter, but he’s scum. He tried to wipe my Tabby out. I have no love for you or your Empire, Vice Admiral, but I know there’s nothing I can do about it. Perhaps one day you will be challenged by someone desperate enough, but for now all I can do is avoid trouble and keep Kooki safe.” Mostynn replied, smiling warmly at his wife and child.

“Alright. I’ll have him called in. And dealt with. Perhaps you could do me a favour, Mr Mimosa? Take your family away from this planet. In six years time it will no longer be safe for you to be here. So I ask, get your daughter to safety – perhaps to Corellia? Or even to Byss. Anywhere but here. You may find that your lives depend on it.” Andrelious pleaded.

*What are you saying happens, Andrelious? Do your Empire do something to this planet?* Tabby thought, deliberately directing it towards the Warlord.

*You just have to trust me on this one. One Force sensitive to another, as you said. Except of course there’s another who can hear us, even as she suckles. I’ll see you in a while, Kooki. For now I need your parents to get you off Alderaan.* Inahj responded, wondering if the baby’s own Force ability allowed her to understand what she was hearing.

“I think we’ll stay put, Vice Admiral. Just because I helped you with this particular enquiry doesn’t mean I’m going to start trusting you, or any of your subordinates. If you really want to help us you’ll arrange for safe passage to take us back to Alderaan. And the sooner the better,” Mostynn hissed. Inahj sensed a great deal of distrust in the man, but also that his concern for his family and their safety was enough that he would not do anything foolish. In many ways, Mostynn Mimosa seemed an average family man. Much like Andrelious’ own father.

*I wouldn’t try to persuade him otherwise. He’s a proud Alderaanian. I wanted him to move to Corellia with me when we got married in an attempt to appease the local community. Sadly he’d have none of it – I’ve not seen my own family in many years now. Poor Kooki will never get to meet her grandparents,* Tabby warned telepathically.

*You never know what may happen. All I can do is ask you to get off Alderaan. If you and your husband don’t listen, there’s nothing more I can do. There’s much more I would like to tell you, but I know you would think of me as insane.*

“Well, if we’re done, Vice Admiral? I’m sure you have **other** people to be dealing with. Come on, Tabby. We shouldn’t exchange too many pleasantries with Imperials. They’ll only stab us in the back one day.” Mostynn stated stoically in a way that reminded him of Kooki’s colder moments.

As the three Mimosas left the room, with the tiny baby girl now napping in her mother’s arms, Andrelious went to push the button on his commsystem that would have Quistic send in the next ‘suspect’, but he found himself short of breath. The Warlord collapsed onto the floor, trying desperately to get some more air into his lungs.

Writhing on the floor, Inahj felt himself losing consciousness as the room’s lighting appeared to darken a little.

**“He moved, Master!”**

**“I saw it, dear. It’s probably just a reflex movement. Neither these monitors nor the Force are telling me that Andrelious is about to wake up.”**

**“What do you know about monitors? You don’t even have eyes!”**

**“Kooki dear, I know you’re angry, but becoming like your dear Andrel was before he met you isn’t going to help. You’ll get the chance to be angry when the DIA catch whoever it was that did this.”**

“I THOUGHT YOU WERE THE ETERNAL OPTIMIST, ATYIRU! BY THE SOUNDS OF IT YOU’RE GIVING UP ON ME!” Andrelious yelled, banging at the floor angrily. The effort of yelling was enough to use the last of the air that the Warlord appeared to have at his disposal, and he passed out.

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“Sir?”

Andrelious sat up. The lighting had come back on and as usual there was no sign of Kooki, Atyiru or indeed any other Arconan. The only other person in the room was Lieutenant Quistic.

“Erm…send the next person in, Lieutenant. I’d like to get this sorted as quickly as possible. The Mimosas gave me a name – is there anyone called Gobstron among them? If so I’ll deal with him next.” Inahj ordered, clambering back to his chair and trying to compose himself.

“I think you’re overworked, sir. Perhaps you should let the Captain take over these interviews.” Quistic replied.

“No. I’ll never get home if I have Piart deal with this. I’m pretty sure Gobstron is behind this. He might even be why I’m here. Perhaps if I’m able to eliminate him…” Inahj hissed.

“I’ll send him in then. Would you like a security detachment just in case things turn nasty? You seem sure of this man’s guilt.”

“That’s not actually a bad idea, Lieutenant. The Mimosas were convinced of his guilt, and I trust that family. A damn sight more than I trust yours..” Andrelious answered.

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Five minutes later, two stormtroopers stood either side of Inahj, E-11 blasters at the ready. Quistic himself escorted Gobstron in, but quickly left the room, fearing he would be caught in the crossfire if things did indeed turn nasty. The Lieutenant had also begun to feel uncomfortable in the presence of Andrelious, who clearly disliked the man for reasons that he could not comprehend.

Gobstron was a wirey little man, unshaved. What little hair he had left on his head was grey and unkempt, giving him a very untidy appearance. His clothing too was messy. Inahj immediately felt nothing but sheer disdain for Gobstron, deeming him to be little more than a bum.

“Inahj. Andrelious Inahj. Warlord of the Sith!” Gobstron snarled. “How’s that Mimosa bitch doing?”

“What? How do you know that!?” Andrelious demanded, wondering *which* female Mimosa Gobstron meant.

“You Force-y bastards think you’re all so clever with your magical powers, well just you wait! We’re developing something that’ll deal especially with your kind. And the galaxy will be rid of all, Jedi and Sith alike! Normal citizens will be able to travel, not needing to worry about having their minds bent out of shape by the empowered few! Selen will just be the start!” the trampy male ranted.

Andrelious noticed the two Stormtroopers readying their weapons.

“Not yet! I’ll deal with him!” he ordered.

Gobstron leapt at Andrelious aggressively. As the two men tangled on the floor, the lights dimmed, and then started to flicker. The Stormtroopers vanished, but the room remained intact.

**“THAT move can’t have been a reflex. He gripped my hand!”**

**“I sensed a flicker of improvement, dear!”**

On hearing that Kooki and Atyiru had noticed he was responding, Andrelious was galvanised into further action. He punched Gobstron twice in the stomach, but received an uppercut in exchange. Inahj was not well versed with hand-to-hand combat, but Gobstron was fighting like a drunk. His blows were neither well timed nor well aimed, and it was only thanks to good fortune did any of them connect at all.

Using the Force, Inahj hurled his enemy into a wall, before shocking him with a quick burst of electricity. The power of the attack was enough to stun Gobstron, as well as leaving him with severe blistering on his chest.

**“Another movement!”**

With renewed vigour, Gobstron ran towards Inahj, but the Sith was more than ready. Again he hurled the aging man into a wall, this time with even more aggression than before.

“I don’t know what the frak you’re supposed to be, Gobstron, but I know you’re behind all this. I’m going to assume that I’m to deal with you myself.” Inahj roared as he approached his opponent, who was beginning to struggle to breathe as his wounds increased in number.

“I’ll see you on Selen, you Force using bastard!” Gobstron yelled, pulling out a small explosive device. Andrelious saw what the man was trying to do and grappled desperately for it. The explosive dropped to the floor.

Both men closed their eyes.

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Moments later, Gobstron slumped to the floor. The Warlord had realised that the device either hadn’t worked or simply hadn’t been armed correctly, and wrapped his fingers around his adversary’s neck, with such force that he felt the windpipe buckle a little.

**“I’m sure you can feel that, dear? His Force imprint is becoming stronger by the second!”**

The flickering lights brightened one last time before going out completely. Andrelious felt himself collapse, but he did not feel himself crash into the hard metal floor. Instead, he realised he was laying on his back on some sort of soft furniture.

His body felt somehow different, with many unfamiliar sensations, almost as if he’d been caught in some sort of explosion.

*Wait, explosion? I’ve got to open my eyes. Could I actually be home?* Inahj thought, slowly edging his eyelids open.

“My darling!” Kooki squealed happily. She moved to hug her fiancé, but Atyiru held her back.

“He’s still very badly hurt. Just keep holding his hand, dear. Now he’s come round it’ll be an easy enough job for me to get him back to full health,” the Miraluka explained, her bedside manner taking over even as her summit colleague regarded her.

“Atyiru. Leave us. Go and tell the DIA to look for somebody called Gobstron,” Andrelious wheezed, finding it difficult to talk.

The Galeres Aedile simply nodded, whispering ‘Gobstron’ to herself as she carried out her patient’s request.

“I thought I’d lost you, darling!” Kooki sobbed, stroking her fiancee’s hair gently.

“And I thought I’d lost you,” the Warlord replied, a little more clearly than before.

“We had a number of people in here trying to help you. Atyiru was far from the only one. Even Troutrooper came at one stage. He just burbled something about being able to see you on a Star Destroyer, but couldn’t manage to talk to you. No-one else could even sense you as anything other than on your way out from this world. How do you know anything about the bomb, anyway? Our security footage shows you were already comatose when you were brought in,” the Knight stated, her excitement bubbling over to a point that left her talking twenty-two to the dozen at her lover.

“I’ll tell you when I’m better. I’m pretty sure this story I want to be fully recovered for. But I will mention one thing, darling.”

“What’s that?” the female asked.

“You really did make a very cute baby.”

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