***Zeltron Wiles and Cobalt Hospitality***

It had been a long day of trade and covert recruitment in the market square of the starport – the only available one to land on for outsiders – and the evening had been just as long, as Qyreia took steps to make sure the locals knew the score of what was going on in the start above their heads. Of all the outsiders who populated the market district, the Zeltron was likely the most famous by now. Not only did she give fair prices – and secretly hand out Sadowan propaganda – but a red-skinned woman with dark blue hair tended to stand out in a city largely made up of humans.

*Sometimes it’s good to be the oddball.*

The more advantageous part was that, as the night drew on, the nicely-dressed people that had been following her for much of the night had finally gone home, leaving her free to travel as she saw fit. Soft footfalls carried her through the alleyways and streets, now quiet with the subsiding of the initial revelry of the early evening. Several familiar faces passed by – people she had spoken with in the bars and restaurants, or traded goods with during the daytime – and she greeted them in passing, but kept on her way. There was an objective to complete, and it stood stalwart against the night sky.

The traffic control center for Cobalt, or Aracalo IV, if one was talking to the locals. The Zeltron had been watching it throughout the day from her position in the market, noting the shift changes of both the security personnel and the tower controllers themselves, which seemed staggered by about an hour’s difference – security, then controllers. The building itself appeared to have automated security turrets, and she could only guess at the interior. It would be dangerous to go in alone and blind, as she was.

However, she had no intention of going in alone.

Near the end of the strip of ground-level shops was a restaurant and bar that was rather nicer than some of the other dives in the area. It had less personality, but one could enjoy a quiet drink and have better eye-candy to look at. Qyreia had also noted that some of the controllers would have a meal there before their shift; later shift workers might even have a drink… or two. Watching the place from across the market had paid off, apparently. As she approached, she could make out a trio of the traffic controllers in their unique uniforms.

“Alright Q,” she muttered to herself, looking at the scene though the window, “just relax. You can do this.”

The mercenary slipped quietly into the dark shadow of an adjoining alley, practically invisible from the street. Shoulders pressed to the wall, the Zeltron closed her eyes and concentrated, slowly opening the lid on the natural abilities of her race that she almost never let out of their cage. The vice-like pressure of her eyelids intensified and her breathing quickened to a point where she nearly hyperventilated and passed out. Yet once the barriers were down, she stood back up, albeit with legs that shook for several long minutes from the surge of adrenaline that usually came with the shift. Once recovered though, she could feel the difference in the air, and faintly feel the emotions of those within the building.

That did not make her plan any easier on her mental state, but she opened the door regardless of her feelings. When she walked in, the traffic controllers’ conversation about the “work tonight” was enough to confirm her suspicions before a half-dozen set of eyes converged on the red woman, including those of the controllers. One of them, young with scruffy light-brown hair, watched her with particular intensity as she made her way toward the bar, giving him a disarming smile and a wink as she passed.

The murmurs that followed from the table grated on her brain, much like the flirtatious airs she was putting on. Still, the Zeltron knew what she had to do to get them into her trap, half-cocked though it was. She was halfway through telling the bartender when she heard the scuffle of one forcefully stood up and lightly shoved her way. A turn of her head revealed the same young man she had winked at, his buddies behind him looking on anxiously.

“Hey there,” she cooed, hiding the twitch in her eye. *Just think of Keira. Keep the good feels up.*

“H-hey. You new here?”

“You could say that. Made a trading stop today, and decided to take in the local… *atmosphere*.” He looked back to his friends for a hint, and they motioned him to keep going. It was almost endearing. “They’re cute. Friends of yours?”

“You could say that,” he said, finding his courage and taking a seat alongside her. “My name is Trevon. What’s yours?”

*Oh kriff, I hadn’t thought that far ahead!* Qyreia panicked and blurted out the first name that came to mind. “Keira. My name is Keira.”

“Keira? That’s a lovely name.” What had seemed to be a bad idea at first turned out fairly well. Just hearing the name calmed the Zeltron’s nerves and made the latent emotional telepathy more effective. That, combined with the pheromones she was now pumping out, seemed to be having a good effect on her target. “Let me buy you a drink. What’re you having?”

“Stronger liquor than you can handle, Trevon,” she said with a smirk, baiting him further into the rabbit hole.

“Hey now, I’m not lightweight.” He motioned to the barkeep. “I’ll have what she’s having; and put her order on my tab.”

Qyreia chuckled, genuinely amused. *This kid is really trying hard.* “You’ve got no idea what you’re getting yourself into.”

“I think I can handle whatever you’ve got.”

Normally this sort of flirtation would end with profanity and possibly violence, but Qyreia merely blushed a slightly deeper shade of red and smiled. “Alright then.” Her steely eyes shot a peripheral glance at the others he had been carousing with. “So what’s with the uniforms?”

“Oh these? They’re for the traffic control center.” He pointed to the viewing deck at the top. “That’s where I work.”

“Wow. Must be quite the view.” The Zeltron took the drink as the bartender slid it over and spared no time to sips, instead drinking just fast enough to not seem desperate for the liquor. It burned going down, but the flavor was interesting; different from what she was used to. That left her companion wide-eyed. “What?”

“Most people would be on their rears after doing that.”

“You’ll find,” she said, drawing close so he could smell the fresh alcohol on her breath, “that I’m full of surprises.”

The human floundered at that, and went to his drink, clearly taking to it with less bravado that Qyreia had. They talked at length, mostly about him, as the red woman more than matched him drink for drink, even when he switched to less powerful stuff. The Zeltron kept the conversation on Trevon’s work, enough to get a lay of the land but not enough to tip him off. Every time that he seemed to slacken his attention, she’d shoot him another sensuous smile and get his engines warmed up all over again. By the time that his shift was close to beginning, she had gotten his hand around her waist and had her own fingers plying through his hair.

They were both also rather drunk.

“What’s say we take this someplace a little more private?” Qyreia’s hushed voice seemed to do all sorts of subconscious things to the poor boy.

“I-I’ve got work though, Keira, I can’t.” He paused at the look of lewd disappointment in her eyes. “What’d you have in mind?”

“Oh, I was thinking you could take me up to that viewing deck and we could… hook up a power coupling, if you get my meaning.”

With Qyreia’s emotional telepathy plying his mind with the appropriate – or in this case, inappropriate – emotions, and her pheromones already hooking him, his reaction was almost cute. She even felt somewhat bad for the kid when he went over to his friends, a couple of which chastised him for his drunkenness, asking if they could help him make the plan happen. When they assented, he took her by the hand and fell in with the group as they made their way toward the control tower.

The structure looked far larger up close than it did from the landing area, and Qyreia had to crane her neck to even see the protrusion of the control center. When they reached the doors to enter, the security personnel gave her a wary glare and questioned the controllers, who simply responded by saying they were giving her a tour. He let them all pass, though not without a grumbled “Damn traffic cons.”

The interior was spacious, equally fashionable as it was functional, and if not for her wariness toward the others in the group, she was almost enjoying herself. The mercenary’s eyes were also busy noting the locations of different security measures: mag-locked doors, motion sensors, and especially the automated turrets that listed in the corners of the ceiling. With one hand fondling Trevon’s scalp, her other hand went to her jacket pocket to fondle the data-bug, which would transmit the data that the Council wanted to her ship as well as in a steady stream straight to their observation ships in the system.

They walked past several more security personnel, most of whom had similar reactions to that of the one at the entrance, but they passed on regardless. The awkward moment came when they all piled into the lift. While Trevon’s friends stared at the walls around them as they waited, the human that she had wooed ran his hands all over the Zeltron’s figure, which Qyreia would never admit that she half-enjoyed, only stopping him when he reached for her chest or somewhere *else*. “No no,” she whispered, “save it for when we get there.”

Human earnestness does not make a lift go any faster though, and so she was subjected to the mild foreplay for several long moments until they finally reached their floor, only a few shy of the top. Trevon’s friends hid them in a little alcove off to the side of the main corridor while they cleared out the previous shift. Both of them were breathing hard, despite the lack of physical exertion, and their eyes stared long at each other.

The telepathic emotions that Qyreia felt when she kissed the human made her heart beat faster than it had in a long, long time, to say nothing for the kiss itself.

When his friends finally came back, the previous shift long-since passed by, they found the pair working the Zeltron’s jacket off, as well as the top button of her shirt undone. The Sadowan had enough wherewithal to blush at her state and tried to ignore the stares as she passed by and toward the control center, her human courter not far behind.

*Eye on the prize, Q. Get the transmitter on, get out.* Despite her thoughts, the feeling that she had building up was not helping her attention span.

Darkness enveloped the other side of the control center doorway, the only lights being floor illuminators and the control panels themselves, casting an array of light that resembled a sky of colorful stars. That the backdrop through the viewport showed the actual stars beyond the great protective dome only added to the spectacle. A soft “wow” escaped her lips as she stepped further in, her amazement just barely tempered by her analysis of the consoles. The soft footsteps of Trevon barely brought her out of the dual trance.

“Do you like what you see?”

“Hmm… Do you meant the room,” she cooed walking closer, “or you?” She nuzzled his ear and said “Yes” before he could respond. When his hand reached down to her rear, she swatted him away. “Hey now, bolt-brain, check your programming. No need to be so one-tracked about it.”

“I can’t help it. You’re too beautiful.”

“Heh. You must say that to all the girls.” A finger to his lips hushed a protest. “I heard what the guard said. You and your friends have done this kind of thing before, haven’t you?”

The young man suddenly seemed bashful. “T-they have. This is kinda like an initiation for me, you could say.”

*Wow, way to be romantic about it. At least have the decency to lie to me.* The Zeltron breathed a laugh through her nose and sauntered around the consoles, swaying her hips far more than usual. “So… if I wanted to see my ship on here, where would I look?”

“Well, you can see it from the window,” Trevon said, motioning her over with a hand at the small of her back. When they looked down, Qyreia felt almost dizzy and tripped into the human’s waiting arms. “Careful. Don’t want you falling over.”

“Sorry,” she said, somewhat embarrassed, “I’m used to being in a cockpit for that kind of view.” She backed away and took a breath. “What if I wanted to see my trajectory?”

“That’s… an odd question,” he said, almost suspicious.

“Not really, if you think about it,” she said coyly, tip-toeing between the consoles. “We only ever see our travel through a cockpit. I always thought seeing another ship flying in a formation was so amazing, because they matched your moves, and you could see yourself doing everything.”

Trevon’s expression softened. “I guess I can understand that. I’ve never been on a real interstellar ship before, so I don’t know the feeling.”

A gentle hand, less voracious as before, led her over to a large semicircle of consoles on a raised platform that could see the other stations as well as all of the landing pads below. The sense of vertigo was not as strong, yet the copious liquor still in Qyreia’s stomach roiled fiercely. The human showed her one screen and pulled up her ship’s original trajectory, all the way out from beyond the atmosphere. *That’s some serious range they’re packing*, she thought as the distances appeared graphically on adjoining monitors.

“There you go,” he said, slipping away from the console to let her look more closely.

“That’s really… huh…”

Her sentence was interrupted by the feeling of the human’s lips at the nape of her neck and shoulder while his hands wrapped around her abdomen. *Keep it together. Finish the mission! Finish the mission!* Spinning to face the human only caused him to press her into the console, locking his lips to hers – a good enough distraction for Qyreia to reach into her jacket to remove the hacking device. The feeling of passion washed over her, however, making it difficult to slip a hand beneath the lip of the console and find good purchase. When Trevon’s hands became exploratory as his mouth moved to her throat, a soft moan escaped her lips, only encouraging the human.

*Sexormissionsexormissionsexormission…*

The roil in her stomach returned, and a thought entered her mind, and she began thinking back to every bad drinking experience she’d ever had, the worst being a drinking competition with a Wookiee. The roiling grew worse and worse the more she thought about it, until she had to push the poor human away, covering her mouth as she spun to face away.

It was only a second later that she vomited up the entire contents of her stomach onto the floor by the console.

“Uuugh,” she groaned.

“A-are you alright?!” He bent down to try and help, but she wave him away.

“Just… just get a mop,” she managed before another surge overtook her, spewing more opaque bile onto the floor.

A brief pause was all that remained before he dashed for the door, likely to get a mop as to tell his friends what happened. The Zeltron recovered somewhat, only to have another small heave, which purged her stomach entirely. Light dry-heaves continued as she peered through teary eyes at the base of the console, searching for an opportune hiding place for the small tracking chip. In the darkness, it was hard to see, but the combined efforts of feeling around and looking closely revealed a divot in one panel, completely innocuous and serving no practical purpose.

No one would notice it in the slightest.

She planted the bug and switched it on with a firm press, an indicator *beep* quietly emanating from the datapad in her jacket to confirm activation and data transmission and monitoring. A heavy sigh of relief rattled past her lips, grabbing her jacket as the sound of opening doors came from below. Shaky feet held her up, but Trevon was kind enough to keep her standing.

*Note to self*, she thought as he led her out of the room while his friends quickly cleaned up the mess, *don’t ever drink that stuff again; especially against a Wookiee.*

Rather than try and continue, the human led her back down to ground level and walked her to her ship, much to her relief. The mercenary thanked him for the kindness, and mentioned getting together the next day if he was so inclined. She had no intention of honoring the offer, simply saying it as a placation, but he respectfully declined nonetheless. Mutual embarrassment, it would seem, saved her from any further interactions with the young man. His final “Sleep well, Keira,” only served to make her feel worse than she already did physically.

Once out of sight, she buttoned up the ship and walked groggily toward the cockpit, dropping her jacket on the floor to cradle her head, which felt liable to split open. Once in the confined space, she opened up her monitor and typed in the commands to check the data feed from the bug she had placed. This was good technology, and she could already see files of trajectories, arrivals, and departures – among others – all scrolling down neatly on her screen.

“Intel boys will have fun with this,” she muttered, grinning only long enough for it to cause a relapse in her hangover migraine. The crono in the corner of the monitor told her it would be dawn soon, evoking a pained moan: she would have to open up shop soon to care for the people she had tried to recruit. Red fingers danced over the monitor, making one final check that the stream to the Clan’s observation relays was intact before closing the monitor and sulking toward her bunk.

Her head ached from the liquor – now purged from her system – and her body ached from not satisfying the desires she had so vehemently brought to the surface. Eyes darkened in the shadow of the sleeping quarters closed as the Zeltron concentrated, returning herself to her normal state where all of her race’s attributes were bottled up. The resultant headache was twice as bad as the first, but eventually subsided. Exhausted from the drinking, the amorous activity, the hangover, and now suppressing her natural abilities, Qyreia dozed into deep slumber.

The coming day would be busy. She would need the rest.