**BC Case File 003**

*Ghosts*

Kordath Bleu hummed to himself behind his desk as he rolled a worn, wooden token over his knuckles with a wistful smile. A steaming cup of caf sat near where his booted feet rested across the dayplanner filled with scribbles, doodles, and absolutely no plans. His companion, Strong, could see the vaguest impression of teeth marks on one of the Ryn’s ears, probably one of the reasons the Arconan was in such a good mood. The lack of a case should have been causing Bleu more distress. With the change ups in Qel-Droma’s leadership he should have been more concerned with results. Instead, he flipped the token into the air before catching it with the back of one fuzz covered hand and began rolling it over his knuckles once more.

**“Master Bleu, should we not be looking for work? The new Gatekeeper surely would prefer we present her with results that justify the expense of this office!”** spoke the Chiss in a calm, almost quiet — for him anyways — manner.

The Ryn grunted noncommittally. On the one hand, space on Ol’val was at a premium. The first job they’d ran had managed to keep the rent paid for the past two months, if barely, after the cut to Shadow Gate’s operations funds. What the two men, and Sprout wherever he was this morning, considered their second case had been more or less pro bono. Still, Kordath had counted that one as a win; it was always nice to have the homeless population as friends. Lots of eyes, lots of ears.

On the other hand, Kordath wasn’t too worried about the new Gatewarden coming down on him too hard about bringing in the credits. This dry spell on cases had lead to him being able to spend more time with her, sneaking her away from her cover identity for quick meals and the sort. That and not working his way through the night had lead to much more pleasant evenings for the both of them, though he knew he had to provide soon. Even her generosity could be stretched too far, he was certain, and while testing their boundaries was...educational and fun, he didn’t want to waste it on something as petty as credits.

Lost in thought, Kordath was brought back to reality when Sprout came through the door with a small brown bag and his traditional morning sigh. The midget nearly threw the bag towards the oblivious looking Ryn who snatched it out of the air before it could hit him in the face. This routine was becoming normal to the three of them. They really did need work, and soon. Passive aggressive pastry tossing would gradually lead to arguments and violence if they didn’t find something to keep them busy.

Kordath emptied the bag onto the desk, snagging his danish to go along with his caf, and munched away smiling to himself.

“So some of the people living in the Ducts are putting together a collection,” mentioned Sprout as he got himself some caf. Kordath watched with vague amusement, either from his own internal thoughts or from watching the Falleen use the step stool they’d put in the small kitchen for him. “Seems they got conned by somebody coming through trying to sell ‘The Book of the Living Force’, some religious thing. Guy collected credits from people, gave them receipts and everything, said they’d get their texts in few days.”

“Lemme guess, that was over a week ago?” asked the Ryn as he chewed on his danish. As baked goods went they were decent. He started to slip towards that goofy, grinning look again as he thought of the muffins he’d woken up to a few mornings as of recent. She was a bloody good baker.

“Yup,” spoke the Falleen, settling in his own chair near the desk. After removing the booster seat Bleu had thoughtfully put in it with look of disgust. “Looks like they got conned. Thing is a few of them work in the Docks and as far as they can tell, the guy hasn’t left Ol’val yet.”

Kordath got a far off look in his eyes for a moment, his mouth full of danish and one hand holding his mug of caf. His gaze was seeing through the wooden token on his desk, lost in memory.

*“This seems low, even for us, Boss,” piped the young Ryn, all of seventeen years old, to the Mirialan walking alongside him. The older man just grinned down at him and patted the shorter Bleu on the head.*

*“You see the district we’re in, Bleu?” asked Tass, waving at the privacy walls and gates. “This isn’t gonna hurt anyone, these people have credits to spare! Not to mention they’re so concerned about their own reputations that they’d never want people to know they’d been swindled by a couple of no good con men.”*

*“You mean us?” asked Kord, sarcastically.*

*Tass’ patting hand turned into a smack upside the head which the Ryn nimbly dodged both to the annoyance and amusement of the older thief. “Yeah, I mean us. Just remember the spiel, religious text, monks, all that. Throw in that stuff you came up with about them pullin’ ya off tha streets, should go smooth as a Hutt’s underside.”*

*Bleu’s face scrunched up from that mental image. “How do you know how smooth—”*

*“Don’t worry about it,” spoke Tass, a haunted look crossing his visage. “Just sell the texts, tell ‘em it’ll be a few days before they show up, give ‘em a receipt, move on ta tha next house. Bet we can hit tha whole neighborhood before lunch!”*

*Kordath Bleu grinned as he looked at the houses around them. His mentor, Tass Kinder, was right, these people wouldn’t miss some small change like this.*

“Bleu?”

“Hmm?” said the Ryn, shaking himself out of his reverie. “Oh right, uhh, Ducts, huh? Who’d con those people, they do nae have tha credits ta make it worthwhile. How, eh, how much of a collection did ya say?”

Sprout grimaced, “They’ve only put together about two hundred credits, but they also said they don’t care about getting their money back from the guy. They just want him.”

Kord suppressed the mental image of a lynch crowd that came blaring up to the forefront of his mind. He’d always been quick on his feet, at least. This was a conundrum to the Ryn; on the one it was likely a good payday if they caught the guy with his pockets still full. On the other...he’d pulled this same kind of job before, and it wasn’t because it was fun. It was because he’d been hungry. Still, the guy had stolen from those who couldn’t afford it, which rankled the Arconan’s own twisted moral code a bit.

“Bugger it, we get a physical description of tha guy?” he asked, tossing the wrap from his danish in the trash and scooping the token off the desk. He flipped it into the air as Sprout spoke once more while Strong stood to get their coats.

“Uhh, middle aged, they think, MIrialan. Dark hair, face tattoos, not that that tells us much since they pretty much all have those. You okay, Boss?” asked the Falleen as Kord turned to stare at him, the token forgotten as it hit the desk and rolled off to the floor. Sprout picked it up and held it out to Bleu.

“Y..yeah I’m fine, huh. Just got a weird day ahead of us, is all. Let’s go check the flophouses and boardin’ joints in the Ducts, might get lucky and find where this guy was layin’ his head, eh?” spoke the Ryn, taking his token back and pocketing it before accepting his coat from Strong. The trio walked out the door while he shrugged it on, his mind wandering.

*He’s dead, Bleu, ya watched him bleed out in a dark alley after tha pair of ya botched a job. Lots of Miralans in tha Galaxy.*

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The trio sat around a small, round table at Ruby’s Perch a few hours later resting their sore feet. They’d walked the Ducts most of the morning asking after the con man with little result. Kord had hoped for better, but it seemed the guy was bright enough to find his own sleeping arrangements. Plenty of places in the Ducts to lay your head if you looked hard enough and were a light enough sleeper not to get yourself robbed in the middle of the night. Bleu spun his token on the table as they waited on sandwiches and drinks, a light repast before going off once more on the hunt.

“What is that thing, Boss?”

**“Yes, I’ve been curious as well about your memento, Master. It looks like the sort of thing passed down a family line for generations! Yet you toy with it when you think as of late.”**

“Uhh, yeah, heh. Came across it again recent like, lost it for a time after puttin’ it away. Picked it up when I was a wee lad, about a year out from leavin’ me clan. Ryn clan, not...well ya know what I mean. Me one thing I took from Aphran IV; forest world, makes furniture and models out o’ wood. Nice enough place, bit humid for tha likes of me.”

“What, you worked as a lumberjack?” asked the Falleen, amusement thick in his voice.

“Aye, I worked many a job that first year out, before, heh. Before I met Tass, saved me from some big, angry, fat Human who’d nearly ran me over in tha street and called me a bleedin’ pickpocket.”

**“Pardon, Master, but you *are* a pickpocket, are you not?”**

Kord gave Strong a wry grin, “Was after that day. Tass bloody Kinder got tha fatman ta leave me be and then bought me a meal with the Human’s credits, which *he’d* pickpocketed off tha bloke. Security came along a bit later and we had ta bolt; tagged along after him fer a time while he taught me tha basics.”

“Do nae steal from those who can’t afford tha loss, that just makes competition and brings in security troubles,” he stated, ticking a finger up.

“Do nae hurt anybody while you’re thievin’. A theft is rough when ya get caught, an assault is so much worse. Accidentally killin’ a bloke over a few credits is tha worst though,” he stuck up a second finger.

“Always have an exit, always be ready ta bolt,” two more fingers came up.

“And of course, do nae squeal if yer workin’ with partners. Bad form and likely ta cause ya all sorts o’ trouble down tha line. People talk in tha underworld, yer name gets ‘round as a bugger who turns on his mates and you’ll find yerself with a shank in tha ribs later,” he stated grimly, sticking his thumb out.

“Hell of a moral code, Boss.”

The Ryn shrugged, “Served me well enough. Biggest mistake I ever made with it was contract work on Nar Shaddaa. Get yer name out there as a good bloody thief and ya make some good money for a crime boss or three, but never forget tha competition. Buggers nearly ended me, but that’s not tha point o’ this wee talk. Funny,” grunted Bleu as his order was set before him, “the con this guy we’re lookin’ for? Me and Tass ran it a few times as well, just ya know, never on people like ya find in tha Ducts. He was a Mirialan too, be about tha right age for what we’re lookin’ for.”

**“Perhaps your old teacher has come to Ol’val?”**

“Oh come on, Strong, we’d never be that lucky,” chided Sprout as he dug into his own meal.

Kord shrugged and washed down his sandwich with a swig of his beer. “Last I saw Tass, we was in a dark alleyway on Nimban. That’s in Hutt Space, not tha best place ta be pullin’ tha kind of stuff we was doin’, but we’d had ta take a ship there in a wee bit o’ a hurry. Two steps ahead of tha law, ya might say. We was...collectin’ funds,” said the Ryn slowly, choosing to ignore the sideglances his Fade’s gave one another. “Things went wrong, Tass caught a few blaster bolts when we was runnin’. Wouldn’t have been so bad if not for tha slug he caught when I wasn’t lookin’. Told me ta run while he was bleedin’ out, we didn’t know where any kinda medic was, we did nae know a thing about where we was. Told me ta bolt. Gods help me I did it after arguing with him for a minute before we heard tha people chasin’ us comin’ along. Pushed the bleedin’ token in ta me hand before I left, said he got it when he picked me up.”

“So...he’s dead? Probably not our guy then.”

“Probably not,” said the Ryn after a moment, taking another drink and swallowing the lump in his throat. “Bugger was like a….not like a Da’, me Da’ woulda knocked Tass out. More like that Uncle who gets ya in all sorts o’ trouble just for kicks.”

**“A shame. I am sorry, Master Bleu.”**

“Eh, you’d have hated tha guy, Strong,” laughed Bleu.

**“Perhaps, though I suspect without his guidance you would have not survived as long as you have. Also your abilities in tracking your target through unconventional means would make this day much easier.”**

“Hah, yeah, if he was tha one, I’d have nae problems trackin’ him,” said the Ryn, flipping his token into the air again. “Right, guess the next best option is ta just go canvas tha Ducts. Meetup back at tha office before tha night cycle, yeah?”

The other two grunted their agreement as they dug into their food, Kordath downing his beer and leaving first.

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In the office that evening they filtered in one by one, empty handed and tired. Nobody knew where this mystery man was, nobody had a clue where he’d been laying his head down. They’d been all over the winding Ducts as best they could with three men, but the district was a sprawl of dead ends and weird intersections, old mining tunnels and checkpoints turned into watering holes and shops. The Ducts was a great place to disappear and it was causing the Bleu’s crew no shortage of frustration. His Fades mentioned sleep and he waved them off, Kordath sitting behind his desk glaring at his day planner while fiddling with the old token. *Someone* had popped in while they were gone, a note was written in on the chaos that was his planner about ‘skip dinner, late dessert?’ with his own address under it. He knew the handwriting, and he wanted nothing more than to go home, but this case was bugging him.

On a whim he slowed his breathing, blowing the air from himself as he tried to focus. Letting the Force flow through him and into the token, something he’d never been brave enough to do simply because the memories of Tass bleeding out still haunted him. It was one of the many reasons he disdained blasters and guns. Visions danced through his mind, coalescing into a tapestry of half formed images and memories mostly. Some of the things he recognized from their time together, some were older, things Tass had hinted at or mentioned. Then there was the disturbingly clear image of a low cost motel he’d seen in the Jerem Plaza district.

“Oh kark me runnin’, Tass,” he muttered to himself, barely grabbing his coat before he ran out the door. A running Ryn drew eyes even on Ol’val, but Kordath was a known quantity by now for the locals. His few run in’s with security had been mostly resolved with him showing his PI license and some dirty jokes to get them laughing. As such nobody moved to stop him, just gave a few curious looks as he ran down one of the many stairs and ramps that littered the area connecting the districts. Jerem Plaza was a haphazard area, much like the rest of Ol’val, and Kordath had spent his first weeks here just walking the districts trying to learn his way around.

*Always have an exit, always be ready ta bolt*

He saw the motel up ahead and, now that he was looking for it, could sense a familiar presence. It had been altered by time and felt worn and somewhat mangled, but it was Kinder. It was Tass. He crept along the front of the building past windows and doors, narrowing down the location of his old mentor, before coming to what felt like the right door. Kordath stood there, at a loss as to what to do next. This was unlike the Ryn, his mind was so awash with ‘how’ and ‘why’ that he’d not come up with any kind of plan or at least option outside of knocking on the bloody door. As it happened he needn’t have bothered, as the door swung inwards and a haggard looking Mirialan began to step out, a bag slung over his shoulder.

“Ello, Tass,” he managed as the man looked up to find the Ryn standing before him, arms crossed.

Recognition flickered through the older man’s eyes, surprise warring with uncertainty. “Bleu? My boy? I can’t believe you’re still alive!”

“Same ta you, Old Man, now we need ta have a wee bit o’ a chat. Like how are you karkin’ standin’ here when I saw ya bleedin’ out in an alleyway and what yer doin’ connin’ people in tha bloody Ducts!? Ya always told me ta never rob from those who could nae afford it, what happened ta ya?”

Tass started to give the Ryn a wide smile, an attempt to turn on the old charm, before he saw the look in the Arconan’s gray eyes. “They caught me, on Nimban. Kept me alive so they could beat me, torture me, ask questions. Thought I was part of some conspiracy. They tried their damndest ta push me ta the edge, but I had nothing ta tell them. Sure, I tried ta con them at first, give them information about random crap. But they checked up on *everythin’*. Three months of torture and questions, before I found a chance to get away. I’ve done what I had ta do ta survive,” hissed Tass, a wild look in his eye.

“You’re connin’ folk that can nae afford it, Tass!”

“Yeah well the Galaxy is just rough all over, innit!?”

“Blast it, Tass, why did ya nae just look for me? How many Ryn runnin’ about solo ya think? I coulda helped ya somehow, mate.”

“Please,” sneered Tass, “you were a good enough sidekick but I never expected you to even make it off of Nimban without me. Gotta say kid, I am a bit impressed you’re even alive.”

“*Sidekick!?”* growled Bleu. “You taught me everythin’ I knew, Tass, why would ya think I could nae help ya?”

“Listen here ya lil’ fuzzball—” started Tass, quieting abruptly as a nearby door opened, a young Twi’lek woman ushering her daughter out as she turned to lock the door. “Ya don’t know what I lived through, ya don’t know what I’ve done ta survive tha past ten years. Help me? Bah, you’d have gotten me killed, boyo. Never woulda been nailed on Nimban if it weren’t for you.”

“You’re puttin’ that on *me?* Old man, that entire job was your idea,” hissed Kord, prodding the Mirialan in the chest. Kinder glared and shoved the Ryn back, making him stumble. A shout from nearby caused both men to turn and stare, a group of motley dressed citizens of Ol’val standing and watching.

“Oi! That’s the blaggard who conned us!”

“Ya nearly got me done in on Nimban, Bleu, now yer gonna get me got here!” shouted Tass, reaching over and grabbing the arm of the Twi’lek child as her mother turned at the sound of the shouting.

“What do you think—” she began to say as Tass produced a knife.

“Oh come on, Tass, do ya really expect me ta believe you’d hurt a kid? Ya saved my tail when I was already older than the wee one there, let the girl go, mate.”

“They go away, you go away, I’ll let the kid go when I’m on shuttle off this blasted station!” shouted the Mirialan.

“Please don’t hurt my little girl,” spoke the mother off to one side, her voice tight. Kord waved a hand at her, trying to send calming Force energy her way as he held his other up to Tass placatingly.

“Bring it down a notch, Tass,” he spoke, his voice low and steady as he ladened the words with power. “Put tha knife down, let tha girl go. Give these people back their credits and we’ll get out of here, eh? Buy ya a caf, find ya shuttle off station. My treat. Gods know I owe ya. Just put it down, Tass, eh?”

The Mirialan blinked a few times as his eyes took on a faraway look and his knife hand lowered, his grip on the child loosening. When the girl ran he watched dully before looking down at the bag next to him, filled with his ill gotten credits. His eyes widened and focused before turning to glare at Kordath.

“How did you...what...yer bloody one of them...them…”

Bleu grimaced. The mother and child had already run but the mob was approaching quickly. And Tass was about to blow his cover, hard. His mind raced. This man had been a mentor to him for several years, taught him how to lie, steal and generally survive. He’d also instilled in the Ryn rules and ethics that made sense when it came to their lifestyle, ones the old man apparently had decided to flout for the easier path. Kordath felt something in him tear, the idealized vision he had of his old mentor, perhaps, as he moved towards the Mirialan. If he could just knock out Tass...and somehow convince the mob not to kill him...he could get the old man off the station. Where he’d still know what Bleu was now.

The Ryn turned and presented his profile as Tass tried to shank him with the knife, body moving as if on its own as he tried to cope with what he was about to do. He hooked his arm around the older man’s knife wrist and twisted, causing the weapon to fall from his grasp. Kordath closed his eyes even as the edge of his palm moved up and struck Tass in the throat. The sensation of a caved in trachea, not to mention the noise Kinder made, let Bleu know he’d hit his mark. He collapsed with his old mentor, lowering the old man to the cold metal deck. The sound of the Mirialan choking to death on his own fluids and lack of air caused Kordath to shake, but he couldn’t stop listening. He had to deal with this, he knew that. When Tass quit moving he sat still for a time before looking up at the mob that had gathered.

“He had a knife, you did what you had to,” said the apparent leader of the group, a stout woman in an apron carrying a rolling pin. “You the guy we hired to find him?”

Kordath nodded dully and reached over to the bag, pushing it towards the group. “There’s yer credits. Think the fee was two hundred, eh?”

“Fee was the credits he stole, plus the two hundred. We’re honest folk.”

“Credits he stole in exchange for him,” corrected the Ryn, sounding incredibly tired. “Obviously that ain’t happenin’, eh?”

The mob closed in around the woman for a moment and Kord could hear whispering and arguments, before heads began to nod all around. One of the men stepped forward and picked up the bag, reaching in and counting to himself as he pulled a few bundles of credits out. These were tossed into the Ryn’s lap.

“Half, then,” the woman spoke from beside the man. “Thanks for finding him, thanks for even looking, Mister Bleu.”

Kord nodded and waved at them, looking at the pile of credits in his lap. *At least the bills will be paid for a while*, he thought in a detached manner as he glanced at his old mentor’s lifeless body. He felt ill. The mob began to disperse as station security came running up, the mother from earlier along with them. Ten minutes of talking, Kord showing his license and some explanations, and he was told to go on his way. The Ryn didn’t argue and trudged away, not hearing the mother giving thanks or her little girl calling him a nice name.

He passed his office without a glance, trudging along to the next level up and to his apartment, confused that he could see light through the curtains. Realization set in moments before he stepped through the door, too tired and emotionally exhausted to even begin fast talking as the Half-Ryn turned towards him with her jaw set and ready for an argument.

“I know,” he said, waving a hand at her. “I saw tha note, sorry. Shoulda commed, did nae really have tha time.”

He walked past her confused look and started pulling the bundles of credits from his jacket, laying them across his desk before shrugging the garment off and letting it fall to the floor. Something in the apartment smelled amazing but the Ryn simply collapsed on the couch lining one wall, his head resting on the back of it with his eyes staring at the cracked and off white ceiling.

“Kord…?”

Slowly he brought his head back up to look at her and tried to conjure a smile, for her sake. He stuck a hand in his pocket and pulled out the small wooden token, running his fingers over it before flipping it towards her. She grabbed it out of the air with ease.

“Are you okay?” she asked, looking at the wooden disc.

He swallowed the lump in his throat and sighed, “I ever tell ya about a bloke named Tass?”