

The Lights of Zeltros

“I didn’t know that a city could *have* so many lights; and I’ve seen Coruscant!”

The petite Pantoran leaned wide-eyed over the control surfaces of the cockpit of the *Katurno*, her mercenary friend’s YT-1300, looking down at the surface of what she could only assume was Zeltros. It was only yesterday that Leeadra had been invited by an uncharacteristically excited Qyreia — along with Keira, the Zeltron’s girlfriend — to the red woman’s homeworld for what she described as “the most amazing new year’s celebration in the galaxy.” Given the race’s reputation for their wild parties, Leeadra didn’t doubt it.

“I’d appreciate it if you sat down,” the merc chuckled, making a steep bank toward the ground that made the blue Force user sway dangerously in the tight confines of the cockpit.

“Q, be nice,” Keira intoned, though not without a subtle grin.

The Pantoran sat down in a huff, fastening the restraints while her eyes continued to survey the landscape. “Uhh... Hey, not to tell you how to fly or anything, but did we just pass the starport? By like... a lot?”

“We’re not parking at the starport.”

“Part of the celebration?” Keira asked curiously. Despite their relationship, Qyreia’s heritage was not something that came up much.

“Yep. You’ll see. Don’t wanna ruin the surprise.”

As interesting of an idea as it was, the former smuggler had never actually flown over her part of town. *It all looks so different from up here*, she thought, making a wide arc along the suburban outskirts where she knew her neighborhood would be. Traffic control had already cleared her ship and ensured that there was landing space, so it was just a matter of picking out the spot amidst the dazzling array of lights in the gathering twilight. Multicolored tendrils swathed the area, leaving vacant spaces in the display almost easy to perceive, although it reduced the distinct features that otherwise would have characterized the locales from the air.

There she is, the Zeltron thought as her eyes fell on a particularly familiar formation of trees along the forest’s edge just outside of town. Following her mental picture brought her gaze to an empty patch of road adjacent to a house that she was well acquainted with. A gentle pull on the throttle brought *Katurno* to a slow and steady descent, setting down gently in the wide avenue, a few dozen meters between each of the ships to her front and rear.

“Arright folks, we are officially landed. Thank you for riding Qek Spacelines. Please ensure all baggage is claimed and accounted for, and yes, that includes your barf bags.” The other two chuckled as they unfastened their harnesses and made their way as a group down the boarding ramp and off of the ship. “No wandering off ‘til we get the meet-and-greet over with, alright? ‘Specially you, Leeadra.”

“Why’re you singling *me* out?”

“I still recall a certain ‘incident’ involving Keira and a tattoo.” *Although I am in no way complaining about the results. Rrrrrr.*

“Q...”

“Right, right, ‘be nice.’ Just don’t go wandering anywhere. I’ll give you the basic tour so you don’t get lost once the festivities kick in.”

“They haven’t started yet?” the Pantoran asked as they mounted the front stoop, marveling at the revelry that was underway around them.

Qyreia's lips curled into a devious grin as she rang the doorbell. "This is just the warmup; the pre-game."

Within moments the door slid open to reveal a red-skinned woman that, despite her shorter stature, was clearly one of the genetic providers for the mercenary. "Good even- ...Qyreia?!"

"Hey mom," she half-blurted as her mother pounced, wrapping her daughter in a tight embrace.

"Oh, I've missed you since your last visit!" The older woman's gray eyes peered from beneath her long hair — tousled as it was by the hug — to regard the other visitors. "And you brought guests! Keira, lovely to see you again!"

"You too, Mrs. Arronen," the former Quaestor replied as the woman shifted from the daughter to hug the half-Umbaran.

"And who's *this* cute little thing?" she said, turning to the Pantoran.

"Leeadra Halcyon, ma'am." Her hand extended forward confidently — more so than Qyreia was used to seeing out of her former apprentice. "Pleased to meet you."

Incoming hug, the mercenary thought just before her mother side-stepped the intended handshake and nearly picked up the Pantoran who was only shorter by a few centimeters. Keira eyed her lover warily while the woman watched her mother and friend excitedly embrace. Force senses or not, she could feel the shift in the atmosphere when they touched down, the Zeltron community's emotional telepathy and pheromones wafting through the air like an all-permeating cloud. None of that had included Qyreia, who so often suppressed those traits so iconic of her race. Now though, standing at the entryway of the family home, she could feel the first vestiges of the mercenary's essence on the winds of her mind and the unique scent afforded by the pheromones. *She's getting better at that transition*, Keira thought, noting how the mercenary's expression betrayed none of the conscious effort it took to bring the preternatural abilities to the surface.

As soon as Qyreia's mother had released Leeadra from the death-grip, they made their way inside where a large food spread was arrayed along the walls of the ground floor living space. In the kitchen, the towering figure of the mercenary's father was busying himself with putting the final touches on what appeared to be some sort of elaborate dessert. Judging by the smell coming off it, it was definitely sweet, and *definitely* saturated with some sort of liquor — rum, if Qyreia's nose wasn't lying.

"Still got the evil-villain 'stache and goatee," she said, wrapping her arms around her father as he realized they had company.

"You're mother doesn't seem to mind when..."

"Whoa dad, Zeltron or not, no child wants to hear about what their parents do behind closed doors... or how they do it, for that matter."

"Fair enough," he laughed.

He recognized Keira well enough from her previous visits and all of the calls that had passed between their respective households. His introduction to Leeadra was significantly less violently-affectionate as his wife's, which did wonders to alleviate the apprehension the petite Pantoran had at beholding someone so tall. The deep-blue blush on her face suggested other thoughts were running through her mind, but aside for a short-lived stammer, she gave no other outward signs. After passing around drinks, the gathering made its way over to the living room where they all took seats on the comfortable furniture.

"So," Keira said between sips of her concoction, noting its potency, "aside from some unorthodox landing procedures and lightshows, I believe Qyreia was going to show us some of this unique Zeltron new year's celebration."

“Right,” Leeadra chimed in, her attention split between her own drink, the merc, and Mr. Arronen. “What exactly does that entail? Zero-gee orgies or something?”

Qyreia looked almost indignant but both parents just laughed, apparently as much out of amusement as understanding. “No no, nothing like that.” Mrs. Arronen said as she wiped away tears of laughter. “Although *last year*...” She shook her head, “Never mind that. While the stereotypical Zeltron lifestyle is rather hedonistic in nature — as I’m sure our daughter has told you — it’s not all sex, drugs, and cantina music.”

“Though the music scene around here is a big deal,” Qyreia’s father chimed in. “Plenty of clubs and dance parties. In about... oh, an hour or so, the whole street is going to be one big block party.”

“That doesn’t seem so unique,” the blue woman said almost sullenly into her drink.

“Factor in the pheromones and telepathic happy-vibes of a few thousand people in one place.” Despite her propensity to be averse to all things Zeltron, Qyreia’s expression suggested that she actually enjoyed the idea. “Aside from offworlders getting stupid, it’s also probably the safest place to go nuts. Because those good feelings are so important, consent is also very important.”

“You make it sound like I just came here to get laid,” Leeadra chided, though not without a smile.

“Blue and red *do* go good together, aesthetically speaking,” Mr. Arronen noted so casually that he didn’t even notice the extreme blush that crept onto the Pantoran’s face.

“Before *any* of that,” Qyreia cut in, very acutely aware of the blue woman’s wandering eyes, “you two’ll walk around with me a bit to get your bearings.”

With assurances that they would be back in time for the get-together at the house later on, the three Brotherhood members departed for a little exploration. Food and drink stands lined the road — some even just residents in their yards selling directly to passersby. This was neither Keira’s first time around Zeltrons nor on Zeltros, so she was not nearly so overwhelmed as Leeadra. The Pantoran looked like a child that had been ordered to contain their excitement, then taken into a candy store with a few hundred credits. A grin continuously tried to break the barrier of her self-control, resulting in a very awkward expression as she tried to absorb the entirety of the locale all at once. For her part, Qyreia looked as though she was in heaven; utterly in her element.

Lights bedecked every surface they came across, though somehow still being aesthetically pleasing — a cornucopia of colors and intensities that set a soft glow down every road and alleyway. Hidden behind the mouthwatering scents of food that hung in the air were the subtle hints of pheromones of all the other Zeltrons around them. It was the most pleasant assault of the senses that either of the Force users could imagine to exist.

As they explored, their mercenary compatriot explained all the finer nuances that her parents hadn’t. The lack of non-Zeltrons in the area, for instance, was simply because her hometown was not a major settlement. When Leeadra asked what made this particular celebration special, other than the time of year, Qyreia pointed out the lights that hung off of everything to include the ships parked in the midst of the streets. “My folks will probably have some lights for my ship when we get back,” she added amiably. It was not a standardized celebration, she continued, but it was by far one of the largest, since even offworlders looked at calendars. Given that the Zeltros annual cycle was about forty galactic-standard days shorter than the standard year, it was the interplanetary equivalent of some cultures’ lunar new year.

After winding and rewinding through the streets for over an hour, they finally found themselves back at the Arronen household, where other guests were already making merry within. Several of the red personages were familiar faces from Qyreia’s formative years, others were close friends of her parents. A few were strangers fresh off the street; a development that the two Force users thought a bit odd, but didn’t question.

“Oh, Qyreia,” her mother called through the throng, “I’ve got some lights for your ship! Let’s go put them on!”

The merc looked at her companions, “Told ya.”

Decorating her ship’s exterior became a community effort that, despite her general distaste for people messing with her things, she didn’t seem to mind. Almost as though it was part of the tradition, the party seemed to move out of the house entirely and relocated under the *Katurno*’s chassis. Music filled the air, as well as the sounds of singing and lively conversation. Food and drink likewise appeared unbidden from the house. *Well*, Qyreia thought as she picked up a cup and reclined against a landing strut, *I guess the party’s officially started.*

“Hey kiddo!” he father called from the front of the ship, perched on a ladder they’d used for the lights. “Come here. Got a present for ya.” Leeadra and Keira followed their Zeltron friend closely, making their way up the ladder to see the fresh coat of red paint splayed across the hull in long, broad strokes.

“Daaad?”

“I keep hearing about this ‘Red Qek’ business of yours, and I figured you’d like a little... personal touch to your ship.” He leaned over carefully. “This *is* your ship, right?”

“Yes,” Qyreia laughed. Walking over the hull, she could see that there was indeed a design to what her parents had done. Done up in dark red paint was a large rendering of the Aurebesh “Qek” symbol, underlined by a broad red strip that stretched from fore to aft. “I like it. I approve of this thing.”

Her parents breathed a collective sigh of relief, as well as Keira who had put the idea in their head in the first place. The night wore on and the mercenary’s compatriots were introduced to as many people as they were unique dishes and assorted variations of alcohol. As the minute of the new year approached, Qyreia grabbed her lover and pulled her close to one of the landing struts.

“Almost time. First kiss of the new year,” the Zeltron said as tenderly as she was excited.

“Is this a Zeltron tradition?” *Not that it would surprise me.*

“Pretty sure it’s a universal thing.”

The countdown started, everyone speaking in unison, pheromones and elated emotions filling the warm night air. “...Three! Two! One! Happy new year!” Without waiting for an invitation, Qyreia wrapped her arms around the half-breed’s neck and gave her a surprisingly passionate embrace, complete with tongue.

“Well,” Keira breathed when they finally parted, “happy new year.”

“Indeed,” the red woman cooed. Her eyes twitched slightly and she began looking around. “On an unrelated note, do you know where Leeadra is? Haven’t seen that blueberry in a minute.”

“I... think that’s her over there?” The former Quaestor pointed to another of the landing legs where the small, blue woman was clearly in the midst of some decent lip-locking with a tall Zeltron male.

“Well I’ll be damned, that girl got herself... Wait. Dad?!”

“Yeah,” her mother said, sliding in between the two women, “he’s really going to town.”

“Mom! I... What about... How drunk are you?”

“*Very*,” she beamed.

Keira thought the mercenary might blow a gasket, but she only scrunched her eyes tightly and sighed. “If I weren’t on Zeltros, I would be *so* embarrassed right now.”

Qyreia Arronen, #14369

“Good to know you’re having fun, pumpkin.”

“Just make sure they don’t go the full distance, okay?”

“Can do deary,” she said, slipping past the couple and making her way toward her currently-enraptured husband. “Happy new year, you two.”