**38 ABY**

**Hyperlane to Bespin**

**The “Flamboyant” Mercorn**

“Not the way I pictured the Mercorn making its Maiden Voyage, but hey, I’ll take it.” Said Aru Law.

The Human set his ship to autopilot and walked along the cockpit’s corridor towards the lounge, on the left side of the vessel. There, his partners Amis Jumah and Sage Cormac awaited him. The Human was still getting used to the sip’s layout. Everything was new to him, but a much desired and awaited upgrade from his previous ship, the Star Commuter 2000.

The Lounge and eating area was quite large. It had an auto-chef over by the left side wall and some seats and a table for socialization. It was still very bland, not furnished and with the base templated colors Corellian ships usually come in, Gray. Seated by the table, with a veggie smoothie on her hands, was Amis Jumah, Aru Law’s loyal companion. She would follow him anywhere, and has so ever since they started working together.

“Howdy Smal’lek!” The Human called, his words carefully chosen to annoy her.

“Don’t call me that!” Her blue cheeks turned purplish as she passed her hand through one of her leku.

A grunt came from near the auto-chef. “I can see why you have no lady.” A deep smooth voice said in between hard breaths.

Sage “The Boss” Cormac was doing some sit ups, a hobby of his to maintain his massive bulk. The Zeltron wore nothing but his white pants with sparkling yellow stripes from the top to bottom and his black leathered shoes with silver plated large heels.

“And I suppose you would be suited to talk about that?” Aru countered.

“Few ladies can handle ‘The Boss’,” the red giant said, sitting up for the last time, “but when the right one appears, you bet I won’t miss.”

The auto-chef beeped in announcement of having finished the requested meal. Aru smiled as he smelled his fried Bantha sticks fresh out of the grill. He sat besides Amis and waited for Tinker, his droid, to get him his sticks.

“Thanks pal. Can you keep watch on our course now?” The R2 unit beeped happily and strode away from the Lounge towards the cockpit.

Sage followed the droid. Before exiting he uttered, “Where’s the shower?”.

“Around the ship.” Aru answered. “It’s all yours.”

Aru took a bite of his Bantha stick. They were highly crunchy, and also salty, much to his liking. “Ya want some?” The Human offered a stick to the blue Twi’lek who was sipping on her smoothie.

“No thanks. I prefer healthy food. As should you!” She scolded him.

“Once you’ve had one of this, I assure you you’ll be craving for more.” The Jedi said as he took another crunchy bite on his stick.

“You haven’t told us where we’re going yet.”

“Right. I was waiting for us to get on the hyperlane for safety. Hey Tinker!” The Human yelled, to which a muffled beeping response came in his direction. Soon after, the droid made his appearance. “Can you broadcast me to Sage? He needs to hear this.”

Tinker made a combination of high and low pitched beeps and inserted his communication socket into the ship’s corresponding entry.

“Oi, redhead! Can you hear me?”

“I don’t like having to hear your voice when I bath!” Sage’s static altered voice uttered through the ship’s speakers.

“I’ll be quick.” Aru pulled a small datapad and placed it on the table. “We are to travel to the Cloud City in Bespin. There, our esteemed Consul has arranged for us to meet with a Tibanna gas prospector. Our goal is to secure a solid trade relationship with them.”

“Why does the Consul need Tibanna gas?” Amis inquired.

“Why, to power her hair dryer of course!” The Zeltron laughed amidst the static and the water falling.

“The uses of Tibanna gas from our Clan are confidential. And this is a DIA assignment so there’s that.” Aru read the short lines of intel contained in the datapad. The contact’s name was Omar Constantine, a Human from Coruscant, and nothing more. “Anyways, what I want to stress here is that we’re not going to kill, kidnap, torture or sabotage anyone. Hear that Sage?”

“Why’d you bring me then?” He questioned, confused. “I’m no diplomat.”

“Protection. You’re my bodyguard.”

Laughs could be heard from the speakers, loud and sarcastic.

“Sure, I can do that.” The Zeltron complied.

“Great! So, if everything is settled, make yourselves at home while I nod off for a while. We still have a ways to go.” Aru picked the remaining Bantha sticks and took them with him to his personal bedroom.

The sleeping section of the Mercorn was by the corridor that led to the cockpit. Six stock quarters, three on each side. Aru took the one on the right, closest to the cockpit, should an emergency arise and he needed to take control of the ship quickly. The Human laid on his bed and quickly fell asleep. There was something about sleeping in deep space that always made him sleep better.

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The “Flamboyant” Mercorn flew silently and comfortably until it jumped out of hyperspace when they entered the Bespin System. Years of experience immediately woke Aru up when the ship shook slightly from the jump, indicating that they had arrived.

The Human exited his sleeping quarter to find Sage sleeping on the corridor floor. He had his arms crossed behind his head and was still shirtless.

“You might wanna put something on.” The Jedi disturbed his slumber. “We’re here.”

The Zeltron sat up and locked eyes with him, “You’re not my mamma.”

“Why are you sleeping here anyways?”

“Those beds are too damn small for me!” The Boss angrily explained. “You need to get a bigger room if ya want me to fly on this thing!”

Law chuckled and made his way towards the cockpit. “We’ll make some changes to the design when we got the time.”

The Human then turned his comms online and reached out to the Cloud City spaceport.

“Hello Cloud City Spaceport. This here is Captain Aru Law of The ‘Flamboyant’ Mercorn, requesting permission to dock, over.”

A few seconds of static passed before any response came through.

“Welcome to Bespin Captain,” an accented voice said in Common, clearly not his language, “please make your way to landing pad 2A of sector 9B, we’ll talk when you’ve landed.”

Aru took command of his ship and flew it towards the designated pad. After safely landing, he smiled and patted the chair he sat on, “A Maiden Voyage without incidents. May this be the first of many.”

“We celebrating then?” Sage asked, glimmer in his eyes at the idea of some alcohol.

“Not yet. After the mission.”

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The trio exited the Mercorn. Aru was first, with Amis by his side. Sage came last, walking menacingly. All the eyes were poised on the towering mighty red Zeltron with his purple feathered jacket, golden pants and neon flashing green shoes.

Before them, was a Ugnaught, rather tall for his species, dressed in fine silk clothing.

“I am Beriadoc,” his name ended with a distinct tongue click sound, but other than that, the alien spoke fluent Common, “a representative of the humble Omar Constantine.”

“Greetings Master Beriadoc,” Aru said with a bow, to which Amis mimicked, and Sage, however rather forced to it, “I am Aru Law, Aedile of House Qel-Droma of Clan Arcona. These are Amis Jumah, my personal doctor, and Sage Cormac, my bodyguard, though I’m sure none of their services will be necessary during our stay.”

“You are most welcome to Bespin Master Law. We have arranged for you to be installed in the best quarters the Cloud City can offer. May you follow me please.”

Aru gave some quick instructions to the mechanics in the hangar to take good care of his ship, and then followed the Ugnaught.

He took them to the higher levels of Cloud City. Along the wide and clean corridors, Aru crossed paths with other aliens who emanated respectable, noble auras. Much to the contrary of his brown and yellow clothes, or Sage’s rainbow like attire.

The view to the outside was amazing, especially for Amis, who wasn’t used to such views. Her eyes sparkled while watching the puffy clouds that surrounded the floating city.

The Ugnaught stopped by a door. A quick swipe of a card and it opened.

“This is a double room, for the lady and the,” he paused, having to bend his neck a lot in order to see Sage’s face, “and the Gentleman.”

“I hope there’s booze in there.” The large Zeltron entered, having to duck slightly to avoid hitting his head.

“Where is he staying?” Amis questioned, pointing to Aru.

“Master Law will stay a bit further ahead, in the Penthouse.” The Ugnaught gave the room card to Amis and signaled for Aru to follow him.

“Don’t worry Sma’lek. I’m right around the corner.”

“Don’t call me that!” Amis tried to sound angry, but got shy and her blue cheeks got purple instead.

The Human followed the Ugnaught to the end of the corridor. A larger door awaited him and inside, a much larger room he could have imagined.

“Please, enjoy.” said the small alien. “Should you require anything, you need but ask.”

“Thank you.” The Aedile replied. He took his key and entered the room.

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The Human Qel-Droman stood in the middle of his room, rivalling the penthouses back in Nar Shaddaa, minus the debauchery.

Instead, a clean sophisticated room of white and gray tones presented a calm, serene atmosphere, bathed by the artistic touches of some hanging pictures, a designer’s crystal chandelier and a king-size bed that was big even for its standards.

The immense balcony caught Law’s attention, and he headed there. A splendorous view of the sea of clouds, floating just below the city, now with a light pink coloring given by the setting sun. A feeling of humbleness invaded the Aedile’s mind. But he had a mission to prepare.

Aru stepped back inside. He wanted to sit by the couch and read whatever more intel he could take from his datapad’s assignment. “But that bed! I need to lay there.” And so he flew to the bed. It bounced him up and down a few times before settling and allowing him to sigh in relief and comfort.

“You seem rather joyful.” A silvery enticing voice spoke from the bathroom. Not so high in tone that it would be shrill, but a pleasant, floaty cadence. It immediately captured the Human’s attention. Not as much because there wasn’t supposed to be anyone there, but an altogether different reason. “I know that voice.” Said Aru, straightening up in his bed.

From the bathroom, a naked woman walked out. As graciously as a mythical being, without making a sound, the woman sort of floated in Aru’s direction. She stopped in front of him, her hips curving slightly to the left, and her arms crossed, highlighting her breasts.

She had pale skin, and not a single mark, scar or any other imperfection in it. Her lips were small, though her smile was wide and mellow. She had bright green eyes and freckles on her cheeks. Her hair was wavy and ocean blue in color, coming down the middle of her back.

“Are you gonna stand there and watch?” She teased. “What of the manners of men!”

Bamboozled by everything, Aru quickly shook away the view and offered his jacket to the woman. She gladly took it, covering herself with but it. She then stood, barefooted, in front of the Aedile. Both looked at each other, in silence, reading one and other’s minds.

“I missed you!” She grabbed him, hugging him tight, her head resting on his chest.

Aru embraced her with his right arm. Her hair smelled as it had always, of home.

“Alana.” Law whispered. “How…”

“You haven’t changed a bit!” She interrupted. “Well, apart from the new arm, and you look tired.”

She led him towards the couch where they sat by a holographic fireplace, letting off a soothing heat.

“I have so many questions.” The Jedi said. “Why are you here? Or, how did you find me? Better, how are you alive?” She stopped him right there, putting a finger on his lips.

“Perhaps, an explanation is in order.” Alana said, taking the Human’s hand. “Where should I begin? Right. Remember our job in Coruscant? You had just got your new ship, and I was still a naive girl, thinking I could rule the galaxy and whatnot. That was the last day we saw each other. Until now,” she smiled, “that is. After I got shot by the Coruscanti police and told you to run, they took me in for interrogation. Rest assured, I said nothing about you. But it seems their intelligence services had an interesting agenda going on at the time. One that required someone that didn’t exist to carry on their mission. And so, they announced that I had died, to a very rare disease, as you may know, and had me working for them. Let’s say that, after a few successful jobs, they considered me free of all charges and let me go, as long as I didn’t reveal their secrets. And fast forward a few months, here I am, in your arms again!”

“I mourned you. You could have told me something!” Aru said sternly, his usual laid back manner completely gone.

The Human woman turned to face Aru directly. “If I had told you, you would have come after me. I couldn’t risk that. THEY, couldn’t risk that. I was forbidden to contact anyone I once knew. I was, for all that mattered, dead.”

“And now you simply came back to life? A normal citizen, risen back from the dead?”

She smiled. “I am officially Bria Garner of a colony in Hoth. Far away isn’t it? But I’ll always be Alana Mistar. At least for you. But let’s not dwell in the past anymore. We’re together, and I want to seize our time as much as I can!”

The blue haired woman leaned forward and kissed Aru in his cheek. And then another, closer, and another, even closer, and finally, they kissed. A much dreamt and awaited moment for both of them. Her warmth felt whole, like the missing piece in the Aedile’s being. Her touch, her breath, her taste. All memories of a dream Aru never thought he would have again.

She climbed over him, “Who’s this Amis you travel with?”

Aru’s humor came back. He winked and rolled over the couch, coming on top of Alana.

“Why? Are you jealous?”

“Not in the slightest.” She bit her lip. “I’m here, she’s not.”

“Well said.”

They both embraced and made love to dim warm lights and the sounds of only themselves. The night was late when they laid together, as one. As they once did. And for a long time, the Aedile slept well.

\* \* \*

\*KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK\*

Aru rumbled and rolled in his bed.

\*KNOCK KNOCK\* “Wake UP!” The familiar smug voice of Sage woke the Human.

Aru ordered the door to open, and allowed Sage and Amis in.

“Well well, look at the state he’s in.” Sage laughed hard. “I thought we weren’t celebrating.”

The Human felt a big headache, pounding on his left side of the head. His vision felt blurred and his eyes hurt with the bright lights Sage had just turned on.

“What happened? Where is Alana?”

A wide grin was drawn on the towering Zeltron’s face. “So that’s what it is. You had a woman last night. Well, you’ve got a meeting now so you’d better get dressed.”

Sage went by the counter and started brewing a coffee for his companion, with a generous touch of alcohol to the mix. Meanwhile, Amis pulled a quick analysis tool from her bag and started examining the Human.

“I need to know what happened last night.” She told him, checking his pulse and measuring his temperature.

“What for?”

“So I can examine you properly.” She looked him in the eyes. Dead serious. “What. Did. You. DO?”

There was a pause, an uncomfortable pause. The Human wasn’t aloof to the chemistry between him and his loyal Twi’lek companion, which prevented him from cracking a joke.

“We had sex.” He casually said. “She’s someone I know from a long time, whom I thought was dead until now, and we used to be lovers.”

The Twi’lek smiled and stuck a needle in the only arm the Jedi had left.

“Ow!”

“So she had many opportunities to get close to your body?”

“In a sense… Yeah.”

Amis then ran some quick analysis on the blood sample. One of those analysis came back positive for narco toxins.

“You’ve been poisoned. A sleep toxin to prevent you from waking. Luckily you seem to have an unusual high resistance to this poison. Looks like someone doesn’t want you to make your meeting on time.”

Aru dismissed the hurtful hint and dressed up as quickly as he could. He then chugged his coffee, and the three of them rushed towards the meeting room.

However, upon arriving, the doors to the room were closed, and guarded by four Cyborgs, all armed with blasters.

“I have a meeting with Omar Constantine. Please, let us pass.” The Aedile said.

As he finished speaking, the doors opened. Out from them came the Ugnaught Beriadoc, a finely dressed Human and, crossing arms with him, Alana.

“The meeting has been canceled.” The Human spoke, to which Aru assumed to be Omar. “This delightful woman has been kind enough to explain me of your true intentions with our meeting.”

Aru thinned his look, suspicious of what lies Alana had planted in Omar’s head, but already predicting the worse.

“And what would that be?” He calmly asked.

Omar lift his hand, and to response, the Cyborgs pointed their blasters at Aru and his companions.

“After signing our contract, you intend to kill me and get hold of the entirety of my operation here in Bespin.”

“And why would I do that? How would I kill you without raising…”

“You should arrest them now my lord.” Alana interrupted. “There’s no telling what they might try if let loose for much longer.”

The man agreed and signaled his Cyborgs to arrest them.

Sage immediately tried to fight back, punching one of his captors so fiercely that he was sent several meters back flying.

“Stop! Sage. We’ll solve this peacefully.”

Much to his disgust, ‘The Boss’ allowed himself to be restrained. And then, they were taken to the lower levels, where the cell blocks were located.

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When night fell, the lights on the corridors were shut down. Only weak lamps illuminated the cells. Aru, Sage and Amis had been thrown into a small cell, away from all the other prisoners. The only sounds were of their own breaths, and the buzzing of the lamp inside their cell.

“You just had to sleep with her.” The Zeltron grunted. “You had to!”

“You wouldn’t understand.”

“Maybe, but your desires have led me here. Arrested because my ‘friend’ couldn’t keep his pants on.”

“Will you stop! Both of you.” Amis sounded stern, a tone not typical in her voice. “Fighting won’t get you nowhere.”

Both the Human and the Zeltron turned away from each other.

On the distance, slight steps could be heard. Then they got closer. And finally, within lighting range, Alana popped out from the shadows.

“What do you want?” The blue Twi’lek challenged the woman.

She didn’t deign to look at her, instead focusing on Aru.

“I’m sorry I got you in this situation.” She said. The Aedile didn’t bother moving. “Truth be told, I wasn’t expecting to find you here. You caught me by surprise, which doesn’t happen often.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?” Aru joked, sarcasm and hurt in his tone.

“No. Or yes, if it makes. But that wasn’t why I came here. I just came here to tell you that you will be released in two days from now.” She paused. “I made sure of that. And that by that time, Omar will be dead.”

Everyone looked quickly at her.

“Remember me telling you that I worked for Coruscanti intelligence? And that they set me free? I lied. I still work for them. This is just another mission. One that you almost compromised. And so, I had to take action.”

“By throwing us into prison?” Amis countered. “Great way to solve problems.”

Once again, Alana ignored the Twi’lek, her eyes always poised on Aru.

“I really wish we could have met under different circumstances.” And she left.

As she walked away, the Jedi responded “So did I.”

More minutes of pure silence went by. Then, out of nowhere, the Zeltron got up and cracked his fingers. He moved towards the plexiglass that prevented them from getting out.

“What are you doing?” Amis questioned.

“I’m tired of sitting here. I’m getting out.”

“Yeah, and how? That’s a thick plexiglass window.”

“They don’t call me ‘The Boss’ for nothing.” The giant Zeltron leaned back, and punched the window with all his might. The ‘dum’ of the impact echoed throughout the corridor. But the window stayed up.

“See, I tol…” Cracks appeared on the place Sage had punched. They got bigger, and wider, and bigger again, until the whole thing shattered, and Amis was perplexed, looking at the satisfied Zeltron.

“Oi! You gonna do something or you staying here?”

The Jedi sighed and got up on his feet. Amis picked his hand and placed his lightsaber, which she had grabbed from a table outside, in it.

“The past is no longer. You have a mission.”

Aru looked at her, a smile was drawn on his lips, a familiar smirk with a healthy dose of smugness. “Arcona Invicta.”

“Arcona Invicta!” The Twi’lek repeated.

As they ran through the corridors, Aru explained their new course of action.

“Things might get hairy for us. I will try to stop the assassination. You two will get back to the Mercorn and prepare for anything. If I’m not back in one hour, you leave.”

“Be careful!” Amis yelled as they split at a bend.

“You too, and try not to break too many things!” This last part was directed to Sage whom had picked the blue Twi’lek in one arm in order to run faster.

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Alone again, Aru went for the higher levels of the Cloud City. As he entered the lift, he took the time to clear his head. Focusing on the Force, the mission, his Mistress teachings. When the lift doors opened, a janitor entered and the Human left. He wasn’t recognized. But he was no longer Aru. The Gray jedi had used his Force abilities to mask himself as the janitor he had just passed. A trick that allowed him safe passage throughout the station’s corridors.

As soon as a room with a control terminal presented itself, the Human entered it. No one was there to guard it at this time of the night.

Putting his slicing skills to the test, Aru easily accessed the station’s mainframe and map. He searched through the room’s layouts until he found the one he was looking for, Omar’s suite. After studying the fastest way there, Law darted out.

While running there, a torrent of conflicting emotions rushed through his head. What would he do when he got there? What would be necessary to prevent the killing? Was he prepared to do it? Killing?

No more time to think was allowed, for Aru had arrived at Omar’s suite. He tried to slice open the door, but it didn’t budge. So he lit up his lightsaber and cut his way in.

After the big lump of durasteel fell down, the Human stepped inside and rushed to the room area.

“Stop!” He yelled. Alana looked at him, frightened, surprised to see him there.

“How did you get out?” She asked.

“Does it matter?” He answered. “Put the blaster down Alana.”

“Or what?” The woman defied. Hiding behind the bed, Omar poked his head out.

“Kill her Jedi!” he said. “Kill her and I shall reward you greatly.”

Aru, meanwhile, was still looking towards Alana.

“Don’t do it.” He pleaded.

The woman’s eyes got teary and her pale cheeks rosed up.

“I have to.” Her voice cracked. “They’ll kill me otherwise.”

“You can come with me. I can protect you.”

“You don’t know who you’re dealing with. Your ‘Clan’ couldn’t protect me even if they tried.”

“You have to trust me.”

Omar, feeling safer for having Aru around, got out of hiding and out to the open. Alana took the opportunity immediately and fired.

“No!” Aru stretched his hand towards Omar. The scared Human cowered in fear an closed his eyes. But nothing hit him. The bolt had bounced right of what looked like an invisible wall around him.

“Damn you and your powers!” Alana lunged forward, anger in her eyes, and a knife on her hand. But the Aedile intersected her and pushed her through the room’s window.

Both were falling through the sky. Alana looked at Aru, afraid. Using his Force powers, the Jedi pushed her towards him and grabbed her by the waist. He then pushed himself towards the station’s walls and used his mechanical arm to grab on to something. After many sparkles and pain, he managed to slow himself down enough to grab onto a ledge.

The couple stood hanged, outside Cloud City, a drop away from a toxic death by the giant gaseous planet’s atmosphere.

“Come with me!” The Human yelled. The wind was too strong to speak normally. He looked down to face Alana. Her eyes were red and her tears got wiped by the howling gazes.

“Alana!” Aru called out once more.

She looked him in the eyes. A pure love connected them and for a brief moment, there was peace and silence. And Aru heard her clearly.

“I Love you.” And she forced her from his grip, falling towards the clouds.

“Alana!” Aru screamed for her, in vain, and she disappeared quickly, engulfed by the planet’s fast-moving toxic clouds.

The Human struggled to keep his grip and let go. But his fall was less than a dozen meters. He fell right on top of his ship, The Flamboyant Mercorn, being driven by Sage. The top hatch opened, and Amis poked out, calling out to him.

Sage drove the ship back to the Hangar while the Twi’lek medic patched some of her companion’s wounds. Tinker watched him and monitored his vitals.

“I’m sorry.” She said.

Aru Law couldn’t hold his tears. Not this time. He pressed his head against the Twi’lek’s chest and sobbed.

“I’m sorry.” He said too.

She passed her hand through his hair.

“It’s alright. I’m here.”

The Zeltron waited outside.

“They’re hailing us.” He warned.

“Put them in.”

The holograph was of Omar Constantine, sided by Beriadoc.

“Master Law. I wish to speak face to face with you. I owe you an apology. And there’s a contract to be signed.” The Human prospector announced.

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“I am very sorry to have doubted you and your friends.” Omar said, on the opposite side of the table. “My men are searching for the woman as we speak. If there’s anything else we can do to compensate you, please name it.”

“We just came to sign this contract with you. If you could do that, I would be thankful.”

Omar picked his pen and immediately signed the official contract of business between Arcona and ‘Omar mining and prospecting’.

After all the bureaucracies, the trio left once more for the ship. Then they flew into the hyperlane and headed home.

“Can I?” Amis asked from outside the Aedile’ small quarter.

The door hissed as it opened, and the Twi’lek entered. The room wasn’t made for two people to be there, so both had to sit on the bed. Amis covered both with a blanket and leaned against the wall.

“What’s going in there?” She pointed to his head with one hand and took his bottle of whiskey away with the other.

“Just wondering when or If I’ll see her again. We barely talked, and there was much to be said.”

“Wanna talk with me?”

Aru smiled, sadly but warmly. He and Amis spoke for hours. Mainly about his past, and his adventures with Alana. The Twi’lek listened to all of it. And he was grateful for it.