Dock Master’s Observation Post

Mattock Station

Arx System

The elegant dance of tiny tugs and tenders which filled the endless field of stars just outside the transparisteel window was a testament to skill of those who managed this dock. In their little pits, dozens of officers coordinated each vessel to the appropriate berths. This degree of timing and spatial awareness could only have been acquired through years of practice and was impressive to see. His gaze turned back from the bustle of the pits to the vastness of the dock below and his thoughts turned inward again.

The skeletal keel of a vessel had materialized in an open berth over the last couple of days. The form felt foreign to him and he would not have been able to validate the vessel’s make were it not for the purchase and construction order he’d read moments before. From this distance, he could still see the intermittent spark of welders joining together panel and frame into one contiguous bulkhead. When one was aboard a starship, it was easy to forget the fact that it once began as a pile of durasteel and electronics. But standing here and witnessing the construction process from the beginning offered him a greater appreciation for the marvelous feats of engineering that breathed life into each vessel. He wondered, for a moment, if his father held the same reverence as he worked on the projects of the Galactic Empire.

As the shadow of age grew larger with each passing year, so too grew the number of passing moments where he reflected on his father. In youth, that void in his soul had been filled with every chemical and every romance he could find from Bonadan to Bespin. That wound ached deep and constant as if it were a rheumatic inflammation of his very identity. He shook off the thought, there would be time to be pensive later. As Praetor to the Regent, time that had been previously allocated for reminiscing had been supplanted with briefings and debriefings on investor meetings and production efficiency assessments.

The Warlord slipped his hand into the pouch at his hip and lifted the datapad manifest for one final reinspection. His thumb scrolled the mind-numbing catalogue of numbers and measures and his eyes darted over the figures as they passed. Endless lists rolled from bottom to top of the datapad until his came to rest on one item. The vessel had been parked up at the dock for some time, unmoved. Thran double tapped the vessel, bringing up the registration.

A smirk crept across his lips. While age was beginning to catch up with him, he hadn’t been caught up yet and still had a penchant for mischief. His emerald eyes flashed with excitement. He calculated out his latest plot, pausing only to be captivated by arrival and departure of various warships. After some time, the subtle click of heels on the deck grate came up behind him. With each step the subtle floral fragrance of her perfume filled his nose and shortly there after she was at his side.

Her head barely reached his shoulders and she’d taken considerable measure to clad herself in rags fit for a street urchin. She was in that rebellious phase of life, after childhood, but before adulthood; the dreaded teen years. Yet, if one looked passed her ripped trousers and artificially colored hair and caught a glimpse of her eyes, they could trace her lineage with ease. She was, unmistakably, her father’s daughter. She saddled up beside him.

“I’m bored.” Jasmine said.

“Hello, Bored. I’m...” he began.

“Shut up.” She replied.

“Fair. I thought I would try the dad jokes, but you’re right, it’s not fitting my wit and unending charm.” Thran conceded.

“The only thing you have that is unending is how annoying you are. Can we leave? Inspecting doonium shipments is riveting and all, but doing it all day has me positively overwhelmed with excitement.” She said, looking over his shoulder at the datapad.

“And go where, exactly? Back to Seraph? Why, so you can be bored there instead?” he replied, turning his eyes back to the datapad.

“At least I can have some fun there. I can hang out with Auntie Rayne or go to the beach.” She replied.

“And what about the longshoremen in the cantina? Who are they going to lose money to if we leave?” He replied.

“How did you...” Jasmine said, shielding her face as her cheeks flushed.

“You think sneaking out at night to play sabacc with the dockhands is being rebellious? Child, you know nothing.” Thran replied, passing her the datapad and stepping forward to the observation window.

“You’re not mad?” the girl said, taking the datapad and turning her eyes down to it.

“I’m disappointed.” He replied immediately. “When I was your age, I snuck off Bakura. When I was your age, I was gambling in the core worlds. When I was your age, well...I’m not giving you any ideas. You’ll have to figure out for yourself. You can do better. I expect more from you. And for Sith’s sakes, you could cheat a little...You’re bringing back nickels and dimes. Where’s the racks of credits, buttercup?”

“You’re a certified nutcase, you know. No wonder Ras took me away from you, you’re not fit to raise a child.” She said half-scoffing. her eyes widening as they caught the detail in the highlighted entry on the datapad. “No. You’re not going to...” she continued

“Tell me, girl. Do you want a lesson in Grade-A mischief? Or do you want to go back to Seraph and practice your lightsaber parries ‘till you finally get them right?” he said with a devilish smile.

She nodded enthusiastically, as she mentally dissected every last detail contained within the vessel’s registry. It was a Minstrel-Class Yacht, a Ubrikkian design, called the Exeter. It had been sitting for years, with a moderate maintenance regime, but the most recent report made it seem as though the vessel was ready for flight at any moment. Her primary concern, which was an extraordinarily valid concern, was the name to which the corvette-sized pleasure craft was registered; Evant Taelyan. She immediately knew the risks that they were taking, commandeering a ship once routinely used by the Grandmaster for what her father would undoubtedly call “official business” knowing fully that he too was just bored of counting volumetric units of Tibanna gas.

“So, what’s the move?” she said, whispering so as not to draw the attention of any of the dock officers toiling away in the pits below.

“They aren’t listening, girl. There is too much going on outside this window for them to care what we are speaking about. Do speak up, so these old ears can hear you.” The Warlord said, goading her on.

“Okay, you old cratsch...Where do we get a crew? You can’t fly that thing yourself. It’s not exactly a TIE Fighter. Where are we going? What if the Grandmaster finds out?” the feisty mademoiselle snipped.

“You leave all that to me. Take good notes.” He said with impish joy.

The pair departed the control tower, bound for the hangar bay. The resemblance she bore to her father, which the girl had so desperately tried to shake in changing her hair and hiding her eyes, was lost entirely when they walked alongside each other. She held her head with the same chin up superiority and her gait was as smooth and serpentine as his, albeit with shorter strides. She wore her lightsaber clipped to her belt on the same side, despite it being across body. The girl would never admit she was consciously imitating him, but the secrets locked away in the vault of her mind contained a little girl’s need for her father to say he was proud of her and easiest path to that was to mirror him, if even only subconsiously.

Hangar of The Exeter

Mattock Station

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The Lambda-Class shuttle had lost several streaks of its chromium hull on the vertical wing as it entered the constricted hangar bay. The flight crew was sweating blaster bolts as they lowered the ramp at the nose of the ship. Rank and file, the young officers exited the ship ahead of their passengers. Each pulled their caps down snug over their heads, hoping the thin brims would prevent the Sith from plucking the eyes from their skulls with some dark and unbending evil. The Captain stood tall as two cloaked figures strode down the incline. They didn’t break stride as they walked past.

“Apologies, mi’lord. This vessel was not manufactured to Imperial specifications, the hangar entrance is quite small.” The man said, swallowing hard.

The Warlord paused midstep and turned back to the fumbling officer. His presence, while not intimidating, had a way of bringing bubbling anxiety to the front of everyone’s tongue. The officer, it seemed, was not afraid of violent recourse, but was instead seeking to impress his passengers. The taller hooded figure looked him up and down, before turning back to the diminutive silhouette at his side. The girl drew back her hood.

“My father gets pouty when he sees a more skilled pilot than himself, Captain.” She said.

“Thank you, ma’am.” He replied.

“Gross. Don’t call me that. Jasmine is fine, thank you.” She scoffed.

“As you wish, Lady Jasmine.” The well-spoken man replied with a click of his heels.

“Eh, close enough, I guess. Captain, please take your crew to the bridge and prepare this vessel for departure. The Praetor has very important business that must be attended to.” The girl said, batting back the command which remedied her first perceived issue with her father’s plan.

The pair of Bakurans strode deeper into the vessel. They admired the unique construction of the vessel, noting how different the design philosophy was from Imperial vessels. Even the hangar had banners and pieces of art dotted about, all of which displayed the same over-the-top gaudy sensibility which had become synonymous with the Warlord’s own sensibilities. A gilded figure of some alien siren, caressing silent music from her lips was among the pieces.

“I think I know her.” He said.

“You do not.” His daughter replied.

“I do too.” He snipped back, “Met her on Zeltros.”

“Okay. Listen, we’re here. Now what?” she replied.

“I dunno, I didn’t plan that far ahead. Where do we want to go? Cantonica? Pop by Kessel then go see some freaky shit on Felucia? Oooh, oooh, I know...Let’s go to Antar 4 and get some thermite grenades from some Gotals, then we can go huck them at fishmen on Mon Cala!” he replied.

“What?! You didn’t plan this far ahead?!” the green-eyed girl said exasperatedly.

“Rule number three of mischief. Plans change, so don’t bother planning too far ahead. Stay flexible, stay free.” The warlord said.

“Who makes rules for mischief? And your rules don’t make sense... The last rule was Rule Besh, now it’s rule three? The first rule was the Aurodium rule.” She said, shaking her head.

Just as she went to speak, the Praetor’s personal communicator began to beep. The teen watched her father lift the device to his mouth, without checking who was calling them as they attempted to skip away with a very expensive vessel. She knew the voice instantly, she’d heard it frequently in the last weeks being at her father’s heels and tending to his schedule. It was the Regent.

“Thran Occasus. I have received notification that the Exeter is to break dock at Mattock Station. Did you authorize this?” the croaking voice of the Neti came.

“I did. I’m on board at present, we’ll be shoving off shortly.” The Warlord replied.

“And your purpose for this authorization?” the Regent inquired.

“Business. I have taken the luxury of setting up a meeting with some representatives from an outfit of ex-Sienar designers. They are credible and their designs show promise. They are in need of new clients and we are in need of a new line to product.” The Bakuran replied.

“And you take the Exeter to this meeting? Why? This is not your property.” the ancient Sorcerer pressed.

“I’m presenting an image. They are looking for new clients. If I show up in Imperial vessels, I’m a repeat customer. I show up in some Corellian trash-heap, I look like I have no credits to spend. It’s strategic.” The Bakuran replied calmly.

“You are full of deceit, Occasus. I will be watching you. Send numbers before you back out or sign any deals. If I receive no numbers, you will answer to the Justicar. Piracy is a severely punishable offense.” The voice stopped suddenly and the communicator clicked off.

“I thought you didn’t have this planned.” The girl said, prying.

“I don’t. But you hear that? We’re pirates now! Neat, right?” the emerald eyed man said, taking a step closer towards the statuette. “I swear, I know her.” He continued.

“How do you do that so easily?” she asked following him towards the door out of the hangar.

“What?” he asked.

“Lie. You make it look so easy.” She said, halfway between disgust and admiration.

“Before I give you the last lesson of the day, what have we learned so far?” he asked, quizzing her.

“One: If you plot and plan in secret, it looks like you’re plotting and planning. Most people are oblivious or they just don’t care. You’re safer in public than you think. Two: The Cratsch catches more birds with sweet namana than viciousness. Flattery works better than intimidation. Three: Plans change, stay flexible.” She said, rolling her eyes with each recited lesson.

“Good. You were paying attention. Final lesson. Your lightsaber is not your most powerful weapon. You can kill a man with a lightsaber, but you can topple Empires with the right lies. A lie starts small, the number on your second card at the sabacc table. It gets bigger, the number of games you have won. It grows and it grows. Eventually, you’re not even the one telling the lie anymore, others do it for you. The trick, my dear, to lying is simple...Don’t.” he said.

“What? Are you using spice again? That doesn’t make any damn sense.” She said.

“A lie is only a lie if you know it to be false. When you can believe your own lies, no one will question them. They cease to be lies. So, you want to know how to lie...Don’t.” Thran said smiling. “Keep taking notes while we take this little sabbatical, you’ll get it by the end. Wow! Would you look at this place! We’re some fancy ass pirates, eh?” he continued on through the door and into the cavernous welcoming atrium.

“Have you ever lied to me?” she asked, alarmed by his candor.

“Me? Lie? To you?” he said, “I would never...”

“I don’t think believe you...” She added.

“Are you sure?” he asked

“No.” Jasmine said.

“Huh...That’s weird.” He said, as he began to investigate the ship’s finer details. “So where we headed?” He asked

“Hrm...How about the Chopani Sector?” she said, flashing a glimpse of her inherited smile.

“Ooooh, now the girl has secrets in the Chopani Sector...Let’s go!” Thran Occasus said, settling down into a lavish throne placed in the center of the room.