



Taken By the Alien Kraken King

Author: *Holly Hanzo*

Category: Romance, Paranormal, Fantasy, Science Fiction

Description: Love is like the ocean. You can either float in its warm embrace, or you can drown.

Bourne

I have no use for land dwellers, preferring to live in deep waters with others like me, the kraken outcasts. Yet, as a Royal on Planet Sanos, I was summoned for negotiations with 'hoomans'. My second heart started beating before I surfaced, and when my eyes rested on a blonde female, everything inside me screams mate. When I return home after the negotiations, Kendall will join me as the prophecy predicted.

My reluctant alliance with the beautiful 'hooman' takes a turn when trench creatures try to invade my realm. To save my people, I must rely on Kendall to embrace a destiny she never imagined.

Kendall

Planet Sanos was supposed to be one last chance to save humanity. Before I even arrived at the negotiations, explosions shattered the serene landscape, throwing me into the planet's murky waters. Bourne, King of the Nonmore Chasm, says he rescued me because of a prophecy where all signs point to one thing – whether I like it or not, I'm his.

He doesn't realize I decide my own future.

This spicy sci-fi romance is part of the Abducted by the Ruthless Royal: Planet Sanos series and can be read as a standalone. It features one ruthless Kraken King with wandering tentacles and a curious human scientist. Guaranteed HEA!

Total Pages (Source): 19

Page 1

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

PlanetSanos.Theplanetwe hoped would save humanity.

My heart thudded in my chest as I glanced around at the other women with me as the capsule descended into the atmosphere of Sanos. I'd spent countless hours on our generation ship researching as much as possible about the planet before embarking on this journey, but for all my work, the planet remained an enigma. All the notes I'd taken over the past few months of research rested safely on my tablet. I longed to pick it up for one last read through, but landing protocols required that it remain safely packed in my bag under my seat.

Our shuttle hit a small patch of turbulence, and a fresh wave of anxiety rolled into my stomach. I curled my hands together, pressing my thumbs against the soft skin between my pointer finger and thumb. Supposedly, it was a technique for self-soothing. I'd only read about it, but now, somehow, it felt like the right time to test out the theory.

To my surprise, it worked. If it didn't, it was close enough to a placebo effect to trick me into thinking everything would work out the way it was supposed to. The only thing left for me to do was stare at the walls of the AI-piloted landing capsule from the generation ship taking us to the planet's surface.

The shuttle broke through the atmosphere smoothly, cutting a streak of fire and ionized mist behind us. One day, I hoped to see it for myself as a spectator on terra firma instead of as a participant. Printed images and holo-vids had their place, but nothing like first-hand experience.

The shuttle's AI navigation system chirped. "Final descent in one minute. Prepare for

landing.”

I sat straighter in the five-point harness, locking me rigidly against the seatback. My eyes flicked around at the other women on the mission with me. Nervous energy filled our capsule. Everything was riding on our success.

No pressure. The fate of humanity depended on us. Nope. No pressure at all.

A projector on the far wall showed our destination. Before us, an endless blue world grew larger. Ocean. Oceans. Nothing but water as far as I could see. In the distance, a landmass, perhaps a mountain, rose from the sea. No mega continents like Earth. No mountains or canyons. Nothing familiar. Everything screamed alien.

In my heart, I knew we were the aliens here. But nothing I’d read or studied could have prepared me for this experience. Somewhere I’d read that we were insignificant specks on the timeline of the universe. If we managed to succeed and forge an alliance, we’d cement our place with humanity’s other outstanding achievements. But first, we had to overcome the odds stacked against us.

“Everyone ready?” Brooke, our commander, asked, tightening the strap of her harness.

“As we’ll ever be,” I said, holding my voice steady even though excitement and a heavy dose of nervousness coursed through my veins. Even though I’d spent years studying unique ecosystems on Earth, my preference always rested with marine biology. Getting onto the generation ship, and on this mission, was a dream come true for me. Sanos was different. It had an abundance of water, and though it remained a mystery on the galactic stage, I felt it was alive in a way no one understood yet.

The vid-screen showed the ocean surface rushing to meet us as we careened toward the planet. My stomach dropped as a low rumble shook the shuttle, signaling the

landing gear had deployed.

Five. I inhaled deeply. Four. Three. Two. I exhaled. One.

I'd practiced landing simulations until I could do them in my sleep by muscle memory alone. Nothing prepared me for the sheer vastness of this aquatic planet.

I assumed we'd land on a strip of precious solid ground, but as the shuttle descended, I changed my mind, deciding we'd most likely land on one of the oceans covering Sanos. They all had names, but all specific names escaped me. Whichever one we were closest to, I had no idea. As leader of the mission, I trusted Brooke knew where we were landing.

"Separation complete. Descent module stable," the AI announced. "Impact in fifteen seconds."

With a jolt and a rush of noise, the shuttle struck the waves. For a moment, it felt like the ocean might swallow us whole. Less than a heartbeat later, flotation stabilizers deployed, and our capsule bobbed into position.

We had landed.

"Take me to your leader," I thought, stifling a laugh. Inappropriate time, yet still hilarious.

Brooke, ever the leader, unstrapped herself and stepped onto the landing platform. From my vantage point near the back of the group, it looked to be a floating disc. I couldn't tell if it was part of our shuttle or the alien technology. A twinge of jealousy coursed through my veins.

Brooke called back to us, her excitement palpable. "We're on a beach. It's stunning."

Everyone raced to grab their gear and disembark. We would not keep the royals waiting.

Despite my hustle, I was the last to disembark. The sun sparkled against the pristine beach with alien palm trees speckled along the coast. Aqua water moved with an elegant grace, lapping at the sand. The air rested heavily on my skin, and I inhaled, taking in the thick, salty air as I raised my face toward the alien sun. It had been so long since I'd felt natural sunlight on my skin, and for a moment, I allowed myself to bask in its warmth.

As I descended the platform, I imagined the possibilities of alien creatures, cities and varying sentient life I knew dwelled under the water. Someone on the beach waved, catching my attention. My hands tapped at the cargo pants pockets of my uniform, Not feeling my tablet, I sighed.

“Forgot my tablet. I’ll be right there,” I called, noting my friends making their way to what appeared to be tent-like structures.

I raced inside, grabbed my bag from underneath my seat, and headed out to join the rest of the expedition.

Out of the corner of my eye, I thought I saw a humanoid figure leaning against a large rock near where the descent ramp kissed the shore.

“Tentacles?” I murmured, shaking my head once. “Nah. Has to be a trick of the light. You’re just imagining things, Kendall.” I smoothed my hands over my hair, tucking errant strands against my scalp.

I wanted to investigate the shadowy figure, but the mission came first.

Page 2

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

An explosion came without warning.

A deafening blast erupted from somewhere. Sand splashed up, blinding me. Water surged around me as the platform collapsed, throwing me backward off the landing. Unable to see from the sand, my vision blurred further as cold water enveloped my body.

I fought the disorientation and struggled toward the surface. Something tangled around my ankle, followed by a pulling sensation.

I kicked off my boots to help my buoyancy, but whatever wrapped around me wouldn't let go.

Bubbles escaped my throat, and something solid dragged me deeper, down into the blue gloom. Whatever it was, it wasn't cold steel. Not wreckage. Not current.

I sank lower into the sea. Light faded. The pressure tightened. Then I felt it.

A presence.

I no longer saw large air bubbles, and my lungs burned. Just before the darkness claimed me completely, in a sliver of light, I saw them.

Strong tentacles wrapped around my body, cradling me against something firm, yet soft. I forced my eyes to open and found myself staring into the most beautiful pair of eyes I'd ever seen. Glowing, intelligent, inhuman eyes watched me with interest.

One human hand cupped my head toward a humanoid head and mouth. His mouth opened, and he pressed his lips against mine, breathing into my lungs.

Then everything went black.

“Sire?” My bodyguard’s voice pierced my solitude.

“Enter,” I commanded.

“Bourne, a messenger from the other Royals arrived.” Ahtu entered the meeting hall chamber first, his motions swift. Behind him, the small messenger, a tiny, young shrimp-like creature mixed with delicate tentacles, followed in Ahtu’s wake.

Two bulbous, telescoping eyes peeked from behind Ahtu’s robe.

“Speak, messenger,” I demanded.

A young brineling of indeterminate gender emerged once Ahtu’s wake calmed. “My sincerest apologies.” It pulled an object I couldn’t identify from the ragged edges of its simple seaweed tunic and raised it up toward its mouth with a spindly tentacle. The creature’s eyes, large and round for its body, bore into me with a mixture of fear and uncertainty. I’d seen that look on many creatures before, my own subjects included.

From the microscopic box around its neck, the brineling’s tinny voice filled the hall. “Bourne, ruler of the Nonmore Chasm, your presence is required, not requested, at a meeting on the surface with a group of potential settlers on our planet. I repeat, you are required to attend.”

“Absolute madness!” I bellowed. “How dare they assume they have the authority to order me around? Off to the trenches with this!” My words echoed in the meeting

hall. I threw the shell with such force against the cavernous wall it shattered into countless pieces.

The brineling's skin, a mottled grey which matched the dark stones of the sea floor, blanched at my outburst. It scurried against the wall of the ancient meeting hall, blending in with the bioluminescent ink which coated the walls. The ink narrated the countless decisions made over the eons of our people's history.

"Sire, please understand the gravity of the situation!" the messenger's voice squeaked into the amplifier. Its thin tentacles quivered with anxiety, no doubt from my reputation. The motion sent clouds of sediment from the bottom, shrouding the tiny ambassador in foggy dust. It clamped its mouth shut, but the corners of its lips twitched, as if it had more to say, yet was afraid to speak.

"Apologies." My skin flashed bright blue for a few heartbeats, outwardly displaying shame at my behavior. Still agitated, my tentacles swirled and churned.

How bold of the others to assume I would arrive for the meeting with land-walkers and assume my place with the others. A second surge of rage rose under my skin, and I fought to control my hidden shame, bulky legs, which I kept tucked away in my tentacles. Of their own accord, my tentacles, each thick as giant kelp, slapped the ground in a rhythmic show of displeasure.

The messenger brineling took a tentative step forward, extended a quivering limb to retrieve the message which had fallen in its haste to escape my outburst. It collected the pieces of the scattered shell from the rocky bottom.

I took a deep, calming inhale of the nutrients in the water, and allowed my anger to dissipate as the surrounding current settled. "I understand, messenger," I said, my tone softer now. "I will attend this meeting with the land-walkers and the other royals of Sanos. We must present a united front against whatever threatens our waters. Fetch

my ceremonial armor,” I ordered Ahtu.

“Sire, we do not know for certain that the land-walkers wish us harm,” Ahtu said.

“I know enough. They walk the land.” I dismissed Ahtu’s huff of disbelief with a wave of my hand. “Bourne, you know the prophecy as well as I,” Ahtu said.

“Prophecy?” the shrill voice of the messenger asked. “It is of no consequence. Return to the others and let them know I will join them for the meeting.”

The brineling’s skin returned to its original color, a sigh of relief escaping its pursed lips. It tucked the amplifier into a pouch, bowed once, and darted out of the chamber into the murky depths, moving swiftly through the water.

Ahtu joined me as I headed toward my chamber, his brow furrowed in thought. “Bourne, what if this is the catalyst?” he asked.

Page 3

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

I shrugged. “Nonmore Chasm is not a place for a land-walker.”

“As if it is a natural place for us.” Ahtu’s voice held a hint of sadness.

“It is for the best. We are abominations. Half-breeds. We result from forbidden love.”

“We should not hide in the darkness. Nothing about love is wrong. We are not wrong, nor are we abominations.” “So you say.” Now in my private quarters, I turned to Ahtu. “Drop the servant angle. In here, we are equal, old friend.” I flopped on my plush chair made from the softest sea sponges and allowed my tentacles to part, displaying my humanoid legs. Few in Nonmore knew my dirty secret, and Ahtu could be trusted.

“Bourne, shall I accompany you to the meeting with the others?”

“To the surface only. I assume it will be a closed-door meeting.”

“As you wish.” Ahtu fussed around my chamber collecting the ceremonial armor and the crown last worn by my father. I had not worn it since the day I ascended the throne. He rested the crown on a sea sponge used for displaying my precious possessions. For the last few seasons, an image of my late mother graced the stand. Ahtu placed the crown around her likeness, and a strange calmness washed over me as if the crown belonged to my parents and I was only an impostor pretending to rule. “I will let you change.” Ahtu inclined his head. “Bourne, do not procrastinate. This is your birthright.”

I reached forward to clasp his hand. “Thank you for being a voice of reason.”

Ahtu laughed. “Who else would have the balls to stand up to you?”

“True.”

The chamber grew quiet once Ahtu left, save for the distant murmur of the sea and the steady pulse of the lives of my people humming in the water. This meeting had the potential to be fraught with danger from the land-walkers. I didn’t think the other species would frighten them, but my presence most likely would. Since my parents passed in an unlikely alliance of the trench people and land-walkers, it fell to me to ensure the peace and prosperity of my land and my people.

The iridescent plates of the ceremonial armor shimmered with the colors of the deep sea, each a symbol of the power I held. I allowed the weight of the armor to ground my thoughts. When the armor was in place, I turned to face myself in the floor to ceiling mirror.

“Are you ready, Bourne? You’ve taken longer than usual.” Ahtu waited at my door.

“Yes.” I turned to leave.

“Forgetting something?”

“No.” My trident hung on the wall near the exit.

Ahtu entered and held the crown in both his hands.

“I can’t.”

“You must.” He placed the crown upon my head, just as he had at my coronation.

“There. Now, you’re ready.”

“Ahtu, I will not allow our people to let the balance of Sanos tip from the sea dwellers to those on the land. We have the wisdom of our ancients flowing through our veins. I have learned from my parents’ mistakes.”

“Understood.” Ahtu palmed his trident. “The others were not asking to alter the power, only that we listen. You have an equal voice and vote among the royals.” He clapped me on my shoulder. “Now, let’s go.”

We swam in silence toward the surface. Our bodies, inky blue-black that blend with the depths, clashed with the ever brightening colors closer to the landmasses. Simple fish, corals in varying hues and single finned creatures, the Quxoni, dwelled here.

“Do you hear that?” I asked Ahtu. We paused in the middle of our ascent.

“Hear what?” His eyes shut. “Nothing unusual.”

Thud. Thud.

“That one. A thud.”

Ahtu cocked his head. “No. Nothing.”

There it was again. “What about now?”

Thud. Thud.

“No, nothing.” Ahtu glanced my way. “Maybe it’s your nerves. We’re close to breaching the surface.”

Page 4

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

“Perhaps.” I didn’t think so, but I’d been wrong before.

We swam faster, our tentacles propelling us out of the water with five strong pumps. We emerged next to an enormous boulder jutting out of the water next to a pristine beach. An alien craft, the likes of which I’d never seen, had landed nearby. A rickety platform allowed the occupants to descend.

The first to emerge was female. The second as well. I watched, fascinated, as they exited one at a time. They were all different, with varying sizes, shapes, and hair colors. None caught my attention, save for the last.

Sunlight glinted against her hair, spun like the yellowy glow of the bioluminescence common to my realm. I leaned forward, hoping to catch another glance of her face.

Then I heard the noise again.

Thud. Thud.

An explosion shook the beach where we were supposed to have our meeting. Feminine screams came from the land-walkers, and chaos ensued.

“What happened?” Ahtu asked.

“I don’t know.” My gaze focused on the female with sunlight hair. “Where did she go?”

“Who?”

I lurched out of the water, forcing my tentacles to work in conjunction with my legs, racing across the sand toward the female. Where was she?

A second explosion near my position threw sand in my face, temporarily blinding me. Instinct told me to return to the water. Once under the waves, the sand dissipated. The female struggled to surface, but was losing the battle. A piece of surface debris struck her upper back, or head, and she sank like a castaway stone.

I spun around, allowing my tentacles to spread out, covering the maximum space possible. The tip of my trident tapped against the glowing crystals of the crown that marked me as Royal. A short electric pulse coursed over my flesh, stunning everything my skin contacted.

I reached the female in record time, grabbing her and pulling her against my chest as I turned my back to take the impact of the falling debris.

“What?” I shook my head as I stared into her Larimar-colored eyes. Impossible.

Fates be damned. She wasn’t any random land dweller. The light-haired legged creature I held in my arms like precious gems was my mate.

“Bourne, your eyes,” Ahtu said, swimming up behind me.

“We need to go. Now.” I darted deeper into the darkness, away from the debris. My tentacles tightened around the female, as precious air bubbles escaped her lips. “Two heartbeats,” I murmured before pressing my lips against my fated mate, breathing life changing air and bonding venom into her mouth. If the gods were kind, she would not suffer as my DNA intertwined with hers, allowing her to live with me.

“Damn.”

I woke in a strange place, my scream piercing the silence. Every breath my lungs took felt like fire in my chest, as if the air I breathed was poison. My dream contained wild images of eyes, glowing eyes hiding in the deep, and thick, muscular arms pulling me toward a solid chest. And tentacles, clutching me close, protecting my body from falling debris. It ended with a kiss that seemed to say more with the emotions poured into it.

My feet kicked the air, but I didn't move. Using all the strength I possessed, I turned my head and took in the strange surroundings.

Dim blue light filtered through a vaulted cavern of living stone and translucent membranes. The walls pulsed with soft bioluminescent patterns, like slow ocean heartbeats. Spiraled tendrils of strange flora clung to every crevice. When touched by the light, they shimmered. Pools of water dotted the floor, glowing faintly, giving off steam.

Dry land! I forced my body to move from my current position toward a place I considered safe.

A second scream tore from my throat when I realized I was underwater. Not only was I under water, but breathing with relative ease. The more breaths I took, the less pain radiated in my lungs. Confused, I gasped at the realization, and my mouth filled again, not with water as I expected, but with cool, oxygen-rich vapor my body processed from the water. The vapor clung to my skin like mist, leaving miniscule bubbles on my skin. Entranced, I wiggled my arms and watched the bubbles rise to what I assumed was the ceiling or surface.

Parts of my forearm sparkled as if healing from a burn; if the burn healed in shades of blue and green. If I didn't know better, I would have sworn the colors on my arm looked almost like scales. But that was crazy. It had to be my mind playing tricks on me. I didn't have scales. Out of the corner of my eye, a glimmer of light drew my

attention. Wherever I was, it was beautiful, and I was positive I was no longer on the planet's surface.

Once I crawled onto the damp ground near one of the tidal pools and breathed, a shudder wracked my body. The steam rising from the pool filled the air with a faint, metallic tang.

I flopped onto my back, stretching my arms. After a while, I sat up slowly, my limbs heavy from whatever had happened during the descent. The explosion tore my suit, but my private parts remained covered. Next, I checked my wrist for the data wristband provided as a perk of the mission. It still blinked, though weakly. I tapped at it, trying to access the built-in emergency beacon, but the signal either wasn't strong enough to pass from the depth or through the surrounding material of the cavern. I exhaled and remembered the explosion, but something else niggled at the back of my mind. Eyes. Glowing eyes that belonged to a muscular body with powerful... what?

Somehow, that creature saved me. It brought me to this place. But where was here, exactly? And how was I breathing water? There was a massive gap in my memory.

I shut my eyes again to recall what happened after I hit the water. Falling - yep, I remembered; kicking to the surface and getting hit with something on my upper back by my shoulder, remembered that too. My pulse surged at the memory of warm lips pressing against mine. Now I remembered everything.

The handsome face and torso of a man wearing a crystalline crown over his soft brown hair with otherworldly glowing eyes could breathe underwater. He wasn't human, and yet, I wanted him. Wanted his lips on mine again. I shook my head. This wasn't like me. I never kissed on a first date. Date? I'd been painfully single for years. Whatever happened, I knew this man hadn't taken me on a date. I wasn't dating an alien.

Page 5

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

Now that each breath felt normal and not like a burning fire in my chest, I stood, turning in place slowly, drinking it all in. The cavern with a few dozen tide pools was massive. As I turned, I felt a presence. I wasn't alone.

"Who's there?" I called.

From a pool at the far end of the chamber, something emerged from the water. First, a crown; the crystalline crown I'd seen on the man. His face was severe, regal, inhuman, with intelligent eyes glowing like sapphires with a mixture of caution and curiosity. Coral-like markings and scales peppered his neck and sharp cheekbones. Then his broad shoulders and his torso, powerful and alien, covered in a surface that looked like armor breached the water.

I gasped. My feet froze to the ground. I couldn't run, so I stood, heart pounding.

He stalked closer to me, and the water parted, exposing a writhing mass of thick tentacles. He rose on his appendages. They shone in the bioluminescent flora growing on the walls, sleek, fluid, shimmering with bands of pale light. He raised a hand, extending his palm up to me.

He was enormous, easily over seven feet tall. His muscles had muscles. And I wanted him.

"Kraken," I squeaked. So much for making a good first impression. Did kraken eat humans? I didn't know.

He gestured with his hand again. The motion wasn't threatening, more of an

invitation. Although webbed and clawed, his hand exuded grace.

My instincts warred. He scared me, though he had done nothing other than stand in front of me. Yet something inside pulled deep in my chest, as if a part of me recognized him.

“Where am I?” I rasped, voice hoarse.

The kraken cocked his head, and then, to my astonishment, answered in perfect, but accented English.

“You are in Nonmore Chasm,” he rumbled. “You are far beneath the tides of Sanos. I am Bourne, ruler of the Chasm. You fell. I caught you.” His tone was calm, but his eyes never left mine, as if willing me to believe him.

“Why?” I asked.

“The ocean chooses what it keeps,” he replied. “As do I.”

Before I could respond, the chamber shimmered with shifting light. I turned and saw a pool beginning to boil.

Bourne’s expression darkened. “It is an alarm of sorts,” he explained. “Danger lurks. You disrupt the balance.”

“What?” I asked. “I don’t understand.”

“Of course not. You are not from my world, yet you fulfill the prophecy.”

“What prophecy?”

“You made my second heart beat for the first time in my life.” Bourne reached out for my hand again. This time, I placed my hand in his. He raised our joined hands to his chest. With his free hand, he unclasped a lock on the shell armor, exposing a broad swath of his chest. He pressed my hand against his skin. “Feel that?” he asked, his voice a low rumble.

Against my palm, I felt two distinct pulses, heartbeats. “Yes.”

“Only my mate can awaken my second heart.”

“What? Where’s your mate?” I yanked my hand back, balling it into a fist at my side.

“You misunderstand, little one. You are my mate. As I surfaced, my body sensed your presence. I do not know how to explain it. Mates are sacred, and though I do not yet know your name, you awakened my heart.”

“Me?” I squeaked. “I’m not a kraken.”

“Little one, you are.” Bourne took both my hands in his. He tugged me close, pressing my chest against his. Together, we disappeared underneath the water’s surface. I fought to free myself. “Breathe.” He spoke underwater, and I understood.

“What? How is this possible?” I asked. I gasped as I realized I wasn’t struggling to breathe.

He shrugged. “You are my mate. Mine. What is your name, little one?”

“Kendall.”

“Kendall. A beautiful name for a beautiful female.”

Page 6

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

“Bourne?”

“Yes, beautiful little one?” He leaned into me, his lips millimeters from mine.

“What did you mean by there was danger?”

His eyes darkened, and his voice turned solemn. “There are many factions on Sanos. Some would tear our world apart for our resources that lie beneath. And now, you are part of our battle because you are mine.”

“Bourne, I can’t stay. I have to get back to the others.”

Bourne shook his head. “Kendall, you don’t understand. You’re no longer fully,” he paused, searching for the word, “whatever species you are.”

“Human? I’m not human?” I jerked away. “What did you do to me?”

I’d screwed up, hurt my mate with some of my first words, and I didn’t know how to make it right. Kendall wasn’t ready for the truth. She could never go back to being only a land-walker.

My tentacles reached out to her, but she swam away. “Come to the surface with me.” My voice came out raspier than intended. I hated sounding weak, but hurting this woman, though unintentional, cut me to the core. “Let me explain, please.”

I begged. My mate had me begging and I hadn’t known her for more than a day and she’d been unconscious for most of it. She had me wrapped around her tiny body and

didn't know it. Kendall could command me with a look, and I would do anything she desired. I longed to touch her, but she needed to make the first move, so I forced myself to emerge from the water and sit on the edge of the largest tidepool.

My tentacles tapped the water while I waited until she surfaced. Fortunately, I didn't have to wait long. Kendall emerged, her blonde hair dripping in wavy tendrils down her back. She looked glorious.

"Why? I need you to explain," she said, crossing her arms over her chest.

The act pushed her breasts forward, and I stifled a groan. Kendall had no idea how she affected me. "After the explosions, you fell."

"I remember. Then something hit my back."

"I saw that."

"You were watching me?"

"I raced to help as soon as I noticed you were sinking. I had no choice. My hearts beat for you."

"You didn't give me a choice. I make my own decisions."

"Are you mad at me for saving you?" I asked, daring to hold hope.

"I haven't decided to forgive you."

"Had I not given you my venom, you would have died. I couldn't let you go now that I found you." I took a chance and took her hands in mine. I marveled at the difference in our sizes. Her bones were delicate and I worried I would accidentally crush her

with my strength. When she didn't immediately remove her hands from mine, I smiled. Progress. She'd come around. She had to.

"I wasn't given a choice." Her voice came out small. Vulnerable.

"Would you rather have died?" I couldn't believe it.

Kendall shook her head. "No. But, I breathe under water. I'm not human anymore. I'm not me."

Gently, I squeezed her hands. "You're still the same person you were, with a few extra abilities," I said.

Kendall sighed. "What exactly did you change me into? Will I grow tentacles too? I don't want tentacles. I'm kind of attached to my legs." Her eyes widened as if she was horrified at the thought of turning into something like me.

"No. Your legs will remain. I am the way I am because of my parentage. After we join our bodies, the possibility exists you may acquire gills to aid in gathering oxygen in the deepest part of the oceans."

Kendall bit her lower lip, an act I found utterly adorable. "What about the prophecy? I'm assuming there is more to it than 'I'm yours' and my choices have been taken away."

I cupped her face in my hands. "There is. A land-dweller will arrive in time for the greatest uprising ever seen among our people. They will unite the land and sea."

"I'm not that person. Brooke is the diplomat. I'm a scientist! I'm not trained in diplomacy." Kendall said.

Page 7

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

I waved my hand. “I will teach you. My hearts beat for you. Kendall, you are my mate, just as the fates foretold.”

Her lip trembled, uncertainty written on her delicate features. “Do you wish to see our kingdom?”

“What do I have to do?”

I clasped her hand in mine. “Come with me. I will show you our world.” I guided her into the water, taking care to keep her close to my side. She had begun to trust me, and I would do all I could to keep her faith in me. I spoke in soft commands in my native tongue rather than her language.

Hidden doors opened behind movable walls of kelp. Deep sea eels with bioluminescence wove around us in gentle swirling paths, illuminating a tunnel system that descended deeper than she’d ever been before. The pressure where I planned on taking her would test her upgraded lungs.

“A garage!” Kendall exclaimed.

“Of sorts. These pods are biological. They are the only creatures capable of accommodating our bodies. While they’re not necessary, they are fun.” I winked in her direction. “Grab the hand-grips. For one not used to this method of travel, it can be disconcerting.”

“Got it.”

The translucent pod sealed around us before gliding forward with ease. While she watched the water pulse with life, I watched her, gauging her reaction to my world. Coral towers stretched toward the surface searching for elusive light. Schools of radiant fish shifted in waves in front of our conveyance.

As we descended, the temperature shifted subtly, and the water took on a richer, darker hue. I scanned Kendall's body language for subtle signs that she could handle the chill.

"Our realm is not just the sea and beneath, we control the convergence of the currents. Nonmore Chasm is equally beautiful and dangerous."

Kendall tilted her head, intrigued. "Tell me about the dangers."

"The sea remembers. It holds the memories of our ancestors and the battles they fought. I don't know how to explain it, but I trust the water. I allow it to lead me where it wants to go. It is impossible to fight the water's desires. For us, the kraken, the outcasts, we are safe everywhere. We are the largest predators outside of the Trench. The creatures who dwell there are mindless eating machines. They destroy and consume. Only our kingdom has the strength to keep them contained."

"Sounds scary."

I didn't know if she posed a question, and if it was, I was unsure how to answer. As her mate, I wanted to prove I could protect her. Her life wouldn't be in danger as long as she remained by my side. Instead, I hummed noncommittally. The pod slowed and emerged over a dome of living glass surrounded by palatial coral spires. "Welcome to the palace." Shifting hues of sapphire and emerald, powered by pulses from deep thermal vents cast dazzling light over the city. Between archways and towers kraken and merfolk swam with grace.

“How beautiful. You live here?” Kendall’s eyes widened, taking in my home.

“I do.” I left the conveyance pod and swam to Kendall, holding my hand to aid her descent. Together, we stood on a sparkling platform.

“Is this mother-of-pearl?” she asked.

I shrugged. “I don’t know what the surface calls it. But it is sturdy and prevalent.”

As the platform descended, Kendall curled into my side. I preened at her confidence in my ability to protect her as my people watched. Ahtu met us at the bottom. His eyes flicked between us. “Mate of Bourne. Welcome.”

“Kendall, please.” She extended her hand. Ahtu stared, a quizzical look on his face. “Place your palm in mine,” she said. “It’s a greeting among my people.” She pumped her hand once, and then returned her hand to mine. “What is your name, and how do you know Bourne says I’m his mate?”

“Ahtu. I witnessed the explosion. Bourne rescued you, and I protected you both while he brought you here.”

“Thank you.”

Ahtu’s tentacles folded until he bowed before her. “It is an honor to meet the one who will bridge our realms, healing the rift among the inhabitants of our planet.”

“Let me give you a tour.” I guided Kendall toward the palace walls. Once inside, with my friend and mate, I let down my guard. Ahtu and I told her of the old wars between surfaceinvaders and the kraken defenders. Of the ongoing battle with Trench inhabitants, and of the prophecy whispered in the tides.

Kendall chuckled. “You both think that’s me? I’m not anyone special, just a scientist. I didn’t come here to fulfill a prophecy.”

Ahtu studied her. “Prophecies do not wait for belief. They arrive. And so did you. If Bourne’s hearts both beat, you are the catalyst.” He bowed at the entrance to my private quarters. “Here, I take my leave for now.”

I lead Kendall into my chambers. As I did, the energy between us shifted from something cautious to more personal. My tentacles moved gently, brushing her arm with reverence. She met my gaze and held it. I expected her to pull back, but she didn’t.”

“If I choose not to be part of this world?” she whispered.

“Then I will take you to the surface. You will be free. But know this,” I pulled her closer to me, keeping my voice low, “something inside you belongs to the ocean. Don’t you feel it? Does it call to you as it does to me? Before you decide, think about your past, and what you could have.”

Page 8

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

“I’m drowning,” she murmured.

“Are you?” I placed my hand against her chest, relishing the rise and fall with each breath she took.

“Not literally, I can breathe. Drowning in memories.”

“Instead of looking back, why do you fight so hard to turn toward the future? Become who you were meant to be.” I wrapped Kendall in my arms. My tentacles swirled underneath her, cradling her ass while I lowered my mouth to hers and kissed her with everything I had.

I poured my soul into the kiss, teasing her lips with my tongue. I nipped at her lower lip with my teeth, careful to keep my sharp teeth from piercing her delicate skin. When her mouth parted and allowed my tongue to enter, she melted into me, wrapping her arms around my neck. She threaded her fingers in my hair, tugging gently. I groaned at the slight pain.

Kendall had no idea what she did to me.

Of their own accord, the tentacles not supporting her wound their way up her legs, pulling them apart. She wrapped her legs around my waist and my mating tentacle surged forward. Kendall gasped into my mouth. I took the opportunity to grind against her intimate parts while my mouth plundered hers. My hands caressed her shoulders before moving over her chest. I cupped her generous breasts in my hands, her nipples pebbling against the webbing between my fingers.

I wasn't playing fair, testing our fledgeling mate bond. While I wanted to sink myself into her body and complete the bond, she needed to control the first time, and I refused to take advantage of her conflicting emotions.

She ground herself against me, her warm core making me ache with need. It took all of my willpower to break the kiss. "Kendall, you're not ready for more."

"Bourne, you can't keep me here any longer." I shouted into the empty bedroom. No clocks adorned the walls, so I couldn't be positive how long he'd left me alone, aching with need, but based on my sleep cycle, I guessed no more than a full day. "Just because you kissed the daylight out of me, cuddled me all night without finishing what you started, doesn't mean you get to leave."

Though what I'd seen of Nonmore Chasm and the palace held the beauty of cathedrals I'd read about on Earth in Europe, like Notre Dame, Westminster Abbey or la Sagrada Familia, I couldn't shake the feeling Nonmore was also my prison. A gorgeous prison, but a cage, no matter how gilded, nonetheless remained a cage. For whatever it was worth, I believed Bourne when he said he wanted to keep me safe. But the prophecy lingered.

I wasn't anyone special. I was an Earth-born-and-bred human. Well, maybe not a full human anymore, thanks to Bourne changing me against my will. I still hadn't fully forgiven him for that.

I leaned back on Bourne's sea sponge bed and marveled again at how luxurious it was. Living under the water had some perks, like never needing to change sheets, a fact I discovered after Bourne broke the best kiss of my life last night, carried me to the bed, and curled up next to me, cuddling me in his arms, while his tentacles wrapped around my legs and waist. They were powerful muscles, extensions of his body, capable of extreme harm. But Bourne had yet to do anything to harm me, yet the power he wielded with his trident and strong tentacles kept me on my toes. As

long as he continued to treat me with respect, I didn't mind toeing the line. He was bossy, but I supposed that came from being royalty and

"Follow me." Bourne's voice cut through the stillness of the space, yanking me from my reverie. He slid into the cavernous room, moving with effortless command, his massive form gliding more than walking. Despite his formidable presence, Bourne didn't frighten me. "I know you've been waiting. An urgent matter needed my attention, and you were asleep. I used my judgment." He tilted his head, using the trident in his hand to prop up his crown. "I am used to making spur-of-the-moment decisions."

At his words, I felt my anger dissipate. "It's all right," I said, and I meant it, finding comfort in his certainty, almost as though he were a fixed point in the shifting strangeness of my experience so far on Sanos.

I followed Bourne through a passage lined with glowing coral and whispering currents. The ground pulsed faintly beneath my boots, as though the ocean itself were breathing around them. A thousand questions ran through my mind, but for now, I fell back on my scientific training. My plan was to remain silent, gather information, and observe. "Where are we going?"

"This way," he said, gesturing toward a raised platform in the center of a new chamber. It overlooked a pool of dark, churning water. "We call this the deep mirror. It shows what hides in ourselves."

I hesitated. It sounded strange. "Like magic?"

Bourne gave a low, rumbling chuckle. "To your kind, hoomans, perhaps. To us, it is our resonance. I spoke with Ahtu earlier. He seemed to think it would help you accept your new circumstances."

“It’s humans.” I stressed the vowel. “And resonance?” I asked.

“Watch.” Bourne placed his webbed hand into the pool. The liquid responded instantly.

Images bloomed across the surface, like oil on water. First, a ship crashing on Sano’s atmosphere; explosions on the pristine beaches and sea; drills boring into coral beds with dozens of creatures shouting.

Bourne’s breath hitched as images of nightmarish creatures with claws, rows of razor-sharp teeth, and lashing tails emerged from the deep. His demeanor change sent a shiver through my spine. “What are those?”

“Trench creatures. My people, our people, are the only defense between them and the rest of Sanos.”

Then, the images shifted to her shuttle and the explosion. The women scattered, and I saw myself dragged under the water. “That’s me.”

Bourne nodded.

“Is that what the aftermath of the explosion looked like? It’s a miracle I survived.”

“That’s why I gave you my mating venom. I didn’t think you would.”

I lowered my eyes.

“What about the others? I have to know if they’re alive.” I gestured to my wrist communicator. “The signal won’t go through. I’m not sure if it’s broken. And my communicator is dead.”

Page 9

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

Bourne took the device off my wrist. “How does it work?”

“I’m not sure. I’m not an engineer.”

“Would you like me to see if someone can repair it?”

Hope filled my chest. “Please. I need to get in touch with the others. I want to know if they’re alive.”

“All the royals of Sanos were scheduled for the meeting. If any were near the women, I’m sure the royals would have rescued your team.”

“Do you think they’re alive?”

Bourne blinked. “I don’t know. You are not the first outsiders to fall into our waters. But, to my knowledge, you are the first to be spared.” His voice softened. “If fate was as kind to my brethren as it was to me, your friends are alive.”

“That’s a non-answer if I’ve ever heard one.”

“It is my wish that they are as lucky as I have been.”

I didn’t know what to say, so I allowed myself to fall into companionable silence. I reached out, my fingers brushing the surface of the oil-slicked water. It shimmered again and revealed a grand throne, the back an enormous shell. Bourne rested on it, and a naked woman sat on his lap with her back to his chest. His tentacles held her legs splayed open. His cock thrust into her body while a thinner tentacle flicked her

clit.

“What is that?” Tension filled my voice.

“The throne room.” Bourne’s voice shook. “I’ve never. No.”

“Who is she?” I ground out the words.

“Look.” He pointed. “It’s us.”

I looked and saw myself, my head thrown back in ecstasy, my lips parted in a scream while tentacles writhed over my body, and a tentacle entered my mouth.

Reflection me sucked on the tentacle, while Bourne’s hands cupped my breasts and his fingers played with my nipples.

I turned to Bourne, my body aching with desire. “Bourne,” I rasped. “I ache. Help me.”

“If we do, there is no going back.”

“How far is the throne room?”

Bourne scooped me in his powerful arms and swam faster than I’d ever seen him through a half dozen tunnels.

“Slow down!” someone called as we passed a series of archways.

“It’s the king,” others shouted.

“He has his mate.”

“Where are they going?”

“He’s never acted like this before.” Laughter peeled from some of Bourne’s subjects who had never seen their ruler race through the halls.

He leaned over to whisper in my ear. “My parents never let me play chase in the palace. Even when I was young, they stressed proper behavior. I’m making up for the times I missed racing.”

I couldn’t contain my laughter. We weren’t acting rationally, but I didn’t care. My body craved his. Bourne didn’t stop until he passed a heavy curtain of glowing vines. The room was large, with eight arches, two on each wall. The throne rested on a raised dais at the far wall.

Bourne pressed his lips against mine in a passionate kiss. Never breaking the kiss, he sat on the throne, my legs wrapped around his waist. His hands tugged my shirt out of my pants and we parted only to pull it over my head. My breasts rested in front of his mouth, and he suckled one of my nipples in his mouth.

I moaned. “More.” My hands went to the clasp of my pants and I shimmied out of them with the help of his tentacles. “Handy.” Bourne murmured his agreement against my nipple.

His tentacles slid up the inside of my legs, caressing the soft skin of my inner thighs. I widened my stance, granting him access to my center. A thin tentacle rubbed over my lower stomach, teasing my mound. I gasped at the light suction on my sensitive flesh.

“Like that?” Bourne asked.

“Mm hm,” I moaned, unable to form a coherent thought.

Two tentacles raised my body up so my pussy hovered over his mouth. “Grip the throne,” he commanded. My fingers wrapped around the edge of the shell as he extended his tongue to lick my clit.

I cried out in pleasure. He licked and suckled my clit like a man starved. A tentacle teased the crack of my ass before settling over my empty pussy. It felt firm, yet yielding. The rounded tip slid into me ever so slightly. His tentacle was thick, spreading me, preparing me for the massive cock I knew waited for me. I didn’t know what to make of the smooth shaft, so similar to my favorite dildo, yet more cylindrical. I grunted as he fucked me with the tentacle and suckled my clit in his mouth. My entire body tensed, and a wave of pure pleasure flowed over me. I screamed his name.

He lapped at me until my legs stopped quivering. In a smooth motion, Bourne turned me around, pressed my back against his chest and impaled me on his cock.

“Mine,” he chanted while pounding into me.

I threw my head back, as I had seen in the slick. This me, the real me, grabbed for his hands, pressing them against my breasts. Tentacles gripped my legs, parting me, baring me to anyone brave enough to walk into the throne room while Bourne took me with abandon. His narrower tentacle slid between my legs, and the suction cup latched onto my clit, providing delicious friction with his every movement. More

tentacles wrapped around my arms, pinning me in whatever position Bourne wanted me. I'd never been restrained before, and I found I loved it. "Kendall." Bourne's bellow shook the room as he spilled himself inside my willing body. Hot jets of his seed coated my pussy, and he ground his cock deeper against me, not allowing a drop to escape.

Breathing heavily, Bourne turned my face to his, pressing a kiss against my lips. "Mine. My mate."

"Bourne!" Ahtuburst into the throne room, his eyes averted.

I slid out of Kendall's body and placed myself in front of her. No one saw her naked form but me. Not even my best friend. "Ahtu." My voice came out sharper than I intended.

"Apologies. I would not have interrupted if the situation wasn't dire."

My tentacles hid my mate's nakedness as she hastily dressed in her hooman, no human, clothes. I made a mental note to have the clothes our people wore. Her small size convinced me an adolescent's tunic would serve as a dress. A feral grin crossed my face. And a dress would allow me easy access to her pussy. Yes, I would get her a dress as soon as possible.

"Bourne!" Ahtu waved his hands in front of me.

"Yes?" I snapped.

"Bourne. I'm sure your friend wouldn't have interrupted us."

"It's the Trench." Ahtu's nervous movements churned a current. "We have to go."

“We have warriors stationed there.” I didn’t want to leave Kendall, not after our first mating.

“Haven’t you felt the tremors?” Ahtu asked.

“No. I was,” I paused, not wanting to sound crass.

“Mating,” Kendall supplied. “Claiming me.”

“Feel the ground,” Ahtu said. “They’re more active than usual.”

I splayed my tentacles across the floor and listened with my body. Deep pulses echoed through the water, interspersed with a barely perceptible electric charge.

“Kendall, stay here.” I placed a chaste kiss on her forehead before moving toward the outer corridor. But she followed.

The corridors of the palace lit with warning lights as guards surged past us, heading toward the Trench. Kendall looked on in awe at the multitude of languages spoken. She stayed by my side as I barked orders. She didn’t insert herself, instead observing with a keen eye. When the warning lights slowed to a steady pulse, she spoke. “What’s going on?”

“Come with me.” I took her hand and led her to a hidden room. My war chamber. I swept my hand across a glowing map suspended in a bubble. The projection showed a series of blips, a swarm of Trench creatures. “They are not here to explore. They are here to devour.” My eyes glowed. “According to the scouts, they brought weapons.”

“How far are they from us?” I hated the tremor in Kendall’s voice.

I shook my head. “Can’t be sure.”

“How serious is it?”

“It’s never happened in my reign.”

“If I wasn’t with you, you’d be out there with your warriors, right?”

I hesitated. “I would.”

“Go,” she urged. “It’s where you belong.”

“I don’t want to leave you.”

“It’s your duty.”

“I have a duty to you.”

“And to your people. Bourne, go. If you don’t, you’ll never forgive yourself. Because you know what will happen.”

“Because war is coming,” I said, eyes glowing. “And...”

“And what? What aren’t you telling me?”

“You must decide which world you belong to.”

“I know. I will, soon. I’m not going to argue with you. But I want you to be the leader you think your people need.”

My mate understood duty. She would grow into a great queen, given time.

“How did they find it?”

“That’s what they do. Seek and destroy.”

“Did my arrival have anything to do with their increased activity?” Kendall’s brow furrowed.

“No.”

“Is that a lie?” she probed.

“It is what I believe.”

“Are you going?”

“No. I must protect you.”

Kendall slipped her hand in mine. “Let’s get your trident, and we’ll go together. It’s your battle too.”

My mate. My brave mate. “You’ll need this.” I brought her over to a cabinet behind the projection screen and retrieved a semi-circular device. In my hand, it pulsed with soft light. “This is more than a translator. Only members of the royal families have them.” I adjusted it behind her ear.

“What else does it do?” she asked.

“I will trust you with the biggest secret my realm keeps from the others. Some of the Trench creatures have... abilities.”

“Abilities?”

“They can invade weaker creatures’ thoughts. This will protect your mind from manipulation. It acts as a shield.”

“Well shit. I didn’t expect that. Mind controlling aliens. Fantastic. Didn’t have that on my bingo card for this year.”

“I understood your words, but they make no sense.”

Kendall chuckled. “It’s fine. Let’s get your armor and trident. When we get there, tell me where to stay. I promise, I’ll listen.”

I donned my armor in record speed, pausing to place my childhood chest piece over Kendall. She looked ridiculous in my armor, but it would protect her.

We took a transportation pod to the rim. While I knew my body could withstand the travel there, the potential for fighting and returning, Kendall was an unknown entity. She was too new to our world. If she tired and fell behind, she would be at the mercy of the creatures. And that was unacceptable.

Page 12

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

“Stay in the pod,” I instructed. “If any of the creatures approach, touch here and here,” I pointed. “The pod will move. Once you’re moving, press this area, and it will take you back to the palace.”

Horror etched over Kendall’s face. Drone creatures used for the express purpose of destruction carved through our reef walls. Weapons unleashed shockwaves of electricity against our protective barriers. “I have to go. Remember, I...” I stopped. I couldn’t say I loved her, or could I?

Kendall pressed a finger against my lips. “I know. I feel the same. Now, go kick some Trench creature’s ass.”

With a nod, I barreled into the fray, my tentacles working in tandem to dismantle the front line.

Ahtu appeared at my side, inclining his head in greeting. With his trident, he gestured toward a creature commanding the invaders. Together, we headed for the leader in an ambush. It fought us valiantly, but Ahtu pierced its head with his weapon. The decapitated creature hit the ground, and the creatures it commanded scattered in varying directions.

Ahtu and I gripped hands in celebration, before heading toward the pod where I left Kendall. As we approached her position, a crab-like creature mixed with an electric eel emerged from the rift.

“Kendall?” It called. “I thought you were dead.”

Kendall's mouth dropped open. "How do you know my name?"

Shit. I wouldn't make it to her in time. The device I'd placed behind her ear wasn't working. Fuck. Maybe my venom hadn't fully changed her?

"I'm here to take you back to your people."

"No," Kendall whispered. "You're trying to control me."

My hearts soared. Maybe the device was working. Or maybe Kendall was strong enough to withstand the mind control. I tried to send her a telepathic message that I was on the way, to hold on, but I encountered a block.

"Kendall, I want to bring you home."

"No. I already am."

I froze. She'd decided. And she'd chosen me.

Bourne carried a tray full of a variety of foods into his chambers. Our chambers. That would take some getting used to.

"I didn't know what you wanted to eat."

"Tell me about my options." I changed into a light green tunic from my brand new wardrobe and sat at the table for two Bourne had ordered for his room. He might not outwardly say that he cared, but his actions proved to me he took my comfort seriously.

Bourne launched into a description of the different foods, but my eyes glazed over after the fourth option. I opted for picking a sample of each of the foods. The first

tasted delicious, and I ate the whole piece. The second smelled funny to my nose, but I took a tentative bite. “Nope, this is all yours big guy.” He waited patiently until I’d had my fill before clearing the tray.

“What happens now?” I asked.

“Regarding?”

“I came into your life unexpectedly. I’m sure you have responsibilities and can’t abandon them to hang out with me.”

“Nonsense. My word is law.”

“I don’t want your people to hate me. Bourne, I’m not the kind of person who is happy to lounge around all day doing nothing.”

“Would you like to see what I do all day? One day, when you’re accustomed to our ways, you’ll rule beside me. My only wish is that you are happy here. I will do whatever I can to make you want to stay.”

Bourne brought me to his counselors who graciously allowed me to attend some of their meetings as an observer. Once those ended, he took me into their science laboratories and introduced me to their lead scientists. At first they shied away from answering my questions, but with Bourne’s silent encouragement, I shared my broken tablet. Once the first scientist learned of my desire to contact the other women, we delved into brainstorming potential solutions for blending our technology in order to get it to work again.

So interested in solving the problem, I didn’t notice Bourne left. I headed to the cafeteria with the scientists for a late lunch, and Eta, the lead, escorted me back to the central hub of the palace.

“Would you like to join us again, my queen?” she asked.

“Please call me Kendall. I would love to.” I reached out to give her a hug. “I had a lovely time today. Thank you.”

Eta glowed with happiness. “You are welcome anytime, my... I mean, Kendall.”

Page 13

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

“Did you enjoy yourself?” Bourne asked when I entered our private quarters.

“I did! Eta is amazing. She’s so intelligent. I’m going to go back to work on more projects with them soon.”

Bourne smiled. “You looked right at home in the laboratory. I hope you don’t mind that I left. You were entranced with your work, I didn’t want to disrupt you in case you were making progress on getting the communicator to work.” He held out a deep purple-black tunic. “If you’re not too tired, there’s a place I think you’d enjoy.”

I did a little twirl. “I’m so happy I feel like I could work on projects for hours!”

He laughed. “I will meet you outside our chamber.”

I emerged a few minutes later having changed and fixed my hair. Kraken didn’t wear makeup, so I’d pinched my cheeks to get a bit more color in them. Bourne hadn’t said where we were going, but I assumed it was a date. His attempt at one anyway.

Bourne and I ventured beyond the palace walls in the opposite direction of the Trench. He led me into the heart of the city, to a bustling park-like area under a natural dome. “Welcome to the grotto,” he said.

Dozens of groups of kraken and merpeople milled around. Some huddled together, deep in conversation.

“What is it?” I asked. “Is it a park?”

“Perhaps. There’s a central marketplace, and three natural pools. We tend to gather here for social events. On occasion musicians will perform along with some actors.” Bourne pointed in the direction of some couples wandering. “See them?”

I nodded.

“They’re most likely headed to the farthest pool to reflect and bond. The grotto is a place for all kraken, young and old.”

I marveled at the space. Glowing algae grew on vines that dripped from stalactites above. Their light cast shimmering patterns across the three pools, with a majority of light centered on the farthest pool. The sound of water lapping against the stone was soothing, meditative even.”

“Do you like it?” Bourne asked.

“Very much so. I feel comfortable here.”

“Good. Join me.” He led me to the farthest pool, dropping in with practiced grace. His hands reached for mine, and he lifted me down onto his lap. Bourne’s arms wrapped around my shoulders. “Watch the light,” he murmured. “Most people whisper here, though there are no rules about speaking volume.”

“It seems only right. Like talking at regular volume would break the peace here.”

“You feel it too.”

“I do.”

I sat in silence watching the light flicker across the water in a sensual dance. When I turned, I caught Bourne watching me, his eyes glowing softly, a thoughtful

expression on his face. “You’ve changed,” he said quietly.

“So have you.”

“I suppose. I was raised to see outsiders as invaders. Enemies. But you, you’re different. You’ve made me question that. You challenged me.”

“And you saved me,” I said.

“I’d do it again.” He brought my hand to his lips. “I don’t know what lies beyond the tide for us, but I know I want to face it with you.”

Since other couples occupied the pool as well, I leaned in to whisper in Bourne’s ear. “You don’t scare me anymore.”

His touch moved gently along my arm, the texture of his skin both alien and strangely comforting. “And do I intrigue you?”

I laughed softly. “More than you know.”

In the next moment, my lips brushed against his in a soft kiss. His tentacles shifted me on his lap, the thin one parting my legs slightly to tease my folds.

“Be quiet,” he hissed. I rested my head on his chest as I lifted my hips to grant him entrance. The blunt head rubbed small circles around my clit. He took care to keep his motions slight enough the water didn’t ripple. The suction cup attached and began to pulse. He took time to tease an orgasm from me, and when bliss rolled through my body, I sighed against his chest.

He rose with me in his arms and brought me back to our rooms. For the longest time we lay on the plush bed, staring up at the light shifting on the ceiling. “Do you think

we can make this work?”

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

Bourne's arm curled around me, pulling me close. "My hearts beat for you. Yes. We can. We belong together." He kissed the crown of my head. "My father used to say the ocean is vast. Even the strongest currents begin with a ripple." He paused, thinking. "I'd say we've already made one."

I rested my head against his chest, listening to the rhythmic thumping of his heart.

"I agree. I think we've got something worth fighting for."

"Letmetakeyouon a date."

"A date?" Kendall grinned. "Do kraken date?"

I shook my head. "Not in the sense you're used to. However, I have a plan. I had our researchers read up on Earth and its customs. The dates sound fun."

"Some are," she said.

"Have you been on many?" I hoped not. If she had, I wasn't sure I could compete, since I was making everything up as I went along.

Kendall shook her head. "No. I've read about them."

"When you were studying other planets' customs and comparing them to your own." I nodded sagely.

Her cheeks flushed a deep crimson. "Not quite," she replied.

“From shows?” I frowned after I asked. Didn’t make sense. One watched shows, not read them.

“No,” she squeaked. “I, ah, well,” she paused and sucked in a deep breath. “You have to understand we had a lot of downtime on the ship. I’m a bit socially awkward, so I read a lot.”

“Right.” I waited. “Did you observe others on your ship and take notes on their courting rituals?”

Kendall shook her head. “No. Oh my, this is embarrassing. I read romance books. All kinds. Historical, science fiction romance, contemporary romance, which to be fair were probably historical by the time I got to them, and,” she mumbled something unintelligible.

“I didn’t catch the last part.”

She repeated whatever she’d said, mouthing the word. My shoulders rose in a shrug and I shook my head. Still had no clue. “I can’t believe you’re going to make me say it.” Her flush climbed from her chest to her hairline.

“Say what?”

“Monster romance. They were my favorites.”

A monster. Unexpected. “Do you see me as a monster?”

She reached one of her tiny hands to my chest. “No. You’re not a monster. Intimidating at first. You’re enormous, at least a head taller than anyone I’ve ever seen. It’s kind of,” she sighed. “I don’t know how to explain it. It’s like you swam out of the pages of one of my favorite books.”

Fabulous. Reality was even worse than I thought. She was going to hold me to a fictional man, or monster's standard. Just what I needed. Impossible standards to live up to. A pit formed in my stomach.

"Unfortunately, you're stuck with a very real monster who has never been on a date." I extended my arm. "Would you care to accompany me, anyway?"

Kendall smiled and placed her hand in the crook of my elbow. "It would be an honor."

I led her up a pearl staircase hidden behind a door in our bedchamber. We emerged at the top, and I pushed through a curtain of kelp aside, revealing my private balcony on top of the palace. A table for two rested to the right. A centerpiece of glowing flora rested near the edge, and I'd brought up a meal earlier when I decided to put my plan of wooing my mate into action. "It's beautiful," she said.

I nodded. "It's one of my favorite places. I come here to sit and think. It's peaceful. I enjoy watching the city at night." I held a chair for Kendall. "Come. Feast." I'd prepared a platter of her favorites.

"You did this for me?"

"Of course." We ate and talked about everything. No topic was off limits. She asked me about my family, and I told her stories of my misspent youth causing mischief with Ahtu. She laughed at my recollection of my first time eating a spiny creature with venom that caused my hands, face and lips to swell, and how I'd denied it to my mother.

Eventually, we lapsed into companionable silence after the tray of food emptied. My eyes glowed, illuminating her face framed by a halo of wavy blonde hair. She looked ethereal, otherworldly. Beautiful. Mine.

Eyes on the prize, Bourne, I chastised myself. Go slow. Don't scare her off.

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

“Would you like to see why this is my favorite spot?” Kendall nodded. I sat against one of the marbled columns and pulled her up next to me, nestling her between my legs and tentacles. “Look,” I said, pointing to the city below.

It glimmered and teemed with life. “If we stay quiet, sometimes music drafts up.”

“Really?” her eyes widened. “How amazing.”

“This is where the night gets even better. See the darkened current?”

“Yes.”

“Watch.”

Kendall looked on in awe as a school of jellyfish floated in on the current. Combined with the music drifting upward, the jellyfish appeared to dance, their thin, hairlike tentacles glowing, pulsing, propelling them forward.

Her mouth opened in an O. I loved watching her experience their dance. “It never gets old.”

“Thank you for showing me, Bourne. I wish I could see it again. How often do they dance?”

“Every few rotations.”

She rested her head against my chest. “I suppose you’ll have to let me know earlier

next time so I can prepare.”

It took some moments for my brain to process her words. “So you’ll stay?”

“Bourne, you didn’t have to go through the trouble of tonight to convince me to stay.”

“Oh?”

Kendall shook her head, blond hair undulating with the waves. “No. I feel at peace here. I feel more myself, more at ease and comfortable in my skin.” She laughed, raising her arm, showing off delicate scales, an outward symbol of her change. “Even though it doesn’t look like my own.”

Heat crept into my face. “I’m sorry. I wanted to save you.”

She caressed my cheek. “I’m glad you did. Don’t look so worried. I want to stay.”

“Oh, Bourne. Don’t look so worried. Of course I’m going to stay.” I ran my fingers over the scales on his arms and chest. “I don’t want to leave. Even though I haven’t been here long, this place feels like home. You feel like home.”

He picked me up and twirled me around. “Kendall, little one, I love you. I’m glad you’re staying.” Bourne pressed his forehead against mine. “I don’t know what I did to deserve you, but I will do everything in my power to prove to you that you made the right decision.”

“I won’t regret it. I know what I’m getting into.”

Bourne’s tentacles reached out for me.

“Can we try something?” I asked.

“Anything.”

“Stay there.” A flash of boldness entered my thoughts, and I began to sway my hips to my favorite sexy song. I’d never done a strip tease before, and I’d always thought my first time would be on land, but, whatever, I could improvise. I sashayed to the bed, gyrating my hips, squatting and standing slowly. With every motion, I inched the dress up higher before turning around and shaking my ass.

Bourne’s groan spurred me on. I bent down like I’d seen porn stars do, but I didn’t think I was doing anything nearly as sexy.

“Can I touch?”

“No.” I felt powerful. Beautiful. Wanted.

I pulled the dress over my head and climbed on the bed backward. My legs fell open and I rolled my nipples between my fingers, tugging lightly. I sucked on two fingers before baring my pussy to Bourne’s view. He groaned and reached for his cock, taking two definitive strokes. My fingers made a V shape over my clit, and I rubbed circles around it.

“Is this how you like to be pleased?” Bourne’s voice was raspy.

“One of the ways. There are many things I enjoy,” I teased. “Do you like?” A guttural moan tore from his throat. “I’ll take that as a yes.” Bourne nodded. “Will you try something for me?”

“Anything, little one.”

“Fuck me. I want to feel you on top of me.”

“I’ll crush you.”

“You won’t.” I made a come hither motion. “You’re going to place your hips between my legs, and feel my breasts press against your chest. I’m going to wrap my arms around your neck, and my legs around your waist.”

“Then what?” Bourne’s glowing eyes illuminated the room.

“Then,” I whispered, pulling him closer to my core. My arms wrapped around his neck, and I spread my legs as far as they’d go. “Now... now you’re going to shove your cock deep inside me, and fill me. You’re going to ride me, take me hard and coat me with your seed. Then, we’ll take a break, and go for round two.”

Bourne allowed me to pull him over me, careful not to place his full weight on me. His cock teased my pussy, rubbing against my clit and tapping my entrance. He rested his weight on one arm, and used his free hand to rub his cock around, teasing my hole. He rubbed it against my clit with slow, deliberate strokes before sinking into me slowly.

“Faster. Not slow. I want you to take me.”

He withdrew from my body and I wanted to cry at the loss. I shifted my hips, searching. Wanting. Needing. He cupped my face in his palm, and slammed into me

without warning.

I grunted a garbled ‘yes, like that’ and he continued. My nails raked down his back, and my words slurred together as he grew impossibly thicker.

A cool tentacle played with my ass, but did not enter, while another tangled in my hair pulling my head back and another filled my mouth. Bourne’s mouth nipped at my shoulders. A zing of pleasure and pain mixed as his thinnest tentacle breached my ass.

Full. I was stuffed full and loved every minute. I grunted, groaned and sucked, showing how I enjoyed the fullness of Bourne. Suddenly, his tentacles left my mouth and ass, and his hands grabbed me under my arms as he shot jets of essence into me.

His body quivered, and he flopped down, cradling me in his arms.

“You amaze me,” he murmured, eyes shutting.

“You’re pretty terrific yourself,” I said.

TheTrenchbastardsdidnot know the depths of my wrath. They’d taken Kendall. My mate. I would raze the oceans until I had her back. The seas would turn red, as I bathed in the blood of my enemies, and relished every second. I would spare no one. There were no innocent Trench creatures.

Guilty. Every last one of them.

They didn’t know it yet, but I was their judge, jury, and executioner. A special fate awaited the one who dared take my mate.

My palm slapped the alarm, bathing the palace in red. If I didn’t rest, no one would.

“Bourne?” Ahtu entered my rooms, his hair tousled from sleep. “Why did you sound the alarm?”

“Security cameras. Kendall. They took her!” I buckled my armor around my chest, biceps, and forearms. “Where is the face shield? Fuck. I let my guard down, and now she’s gone.”

“Bourne, slow down. You’re not making sense.”

“No time. Join me. Or don’t. They kidnapped Kendall.”

“Who are they?”

“The Trench creatures.”

Ahtu’s face paled. “Impossible.”

I thrust the portable security screen into his hands. “Watch for yourself. It’s etched in my mind. I have to go to her. Follow me or don’t.”

“Of course I’m coming.”

“Kendall is missing.”

My announcement shook the war room. Ahtu projected her abduction footage on the projection screen. My war commissioners watched in horror as a creature scaled the palace wall, broke into our private quarters and left with my mate slung over its shoulder. Kendall’s still-too human legs kicked at the shelled chest armor, while her balled fists pounded against its back. She writhed and squirmed, trying to escape. Her only semi-success was when her mouth opened and she screamed into its ear.

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

Seconds. The abductor took her in under two minutes. A lifetime.

Ahtu spoke. “Bourne, I don’t believe they’ll harm her. They’re using her to get to you.”

Fear and anger simmered among the gathered members, their voices rising in overlapping dialogue. “This is an act of war,” Ahtu declared. “We must fortify the palace and city.”

“No,” I said. “We can’t waste our resources there. They have Kendall, and that’s what they’ll be expecting, a more fortified palace. I’m taking the fight to them. I’m going to get my mate back.” I unlocked a floor-to-ceiling cabinet and retrieved my father’s trident and his war helmet.

“Bourne, you can’t leave the palace unguarded.”

“I won’t be.” I turned to the General, an old friend my father grew up with. “General Livreu, arm two dozen soldiers, the newest recruits. They remain here under your command. From the rest, spread two units throughout the city, and the others will enter the Trench with me.”

Gasps echoed in the war chamber. The Trench was dangerous. No one entered lightly. It was a suicide mission. “We’ll enter at the spot past the ancient blooms, override whatever technology they’ve contaminated for their purposes, and destroy them.”

“Bourne, what about their mind reading abilities?” General Livreu asked.

“Fuck.” I paced the chamber. “We don’t have enough of the devices for everyone.” I palmed the lone dampener remaining in the drawer. “Ahtu, I’m trusting you with my mate’s life, and mine.”

Ahtu bowed. “It is my greatest honor.” Our forearms clasped in agreement. “You’ve always been a brother to me. My life is yours.”

A scout burst in. “Energy pulses are coming from the blooms. The trench people added something to the blooms. Our engineers say if we damage the graft, we could destabilize the entire trench. They think it’s connected to the city.”

“Let’s go.” I swam out of the room, Ahtu following hot in my wake.

“Bourne. The pods are faster, and Kendall,” he stopped. “What if she’s hurt? Or too exhausted to swim back? Wouldn’t the pod be your best option to return?”

I clapped his back. “Always the voice of reason.”

My anxiety spiked the closer we got to the Trench. “Turn here,” I ordered Ahtu.

“Bourne, the fighting is in the other direction.”

“I can’t explain it. Kendall’s over here somewhere. I know it.”

Ahtu nodded. “I know better than to argue with a mate bonded male.”

The communication system on the pod squawked to life. “Signal lost. Protocol Alpha initiated. Send in the secondary team.”

My hearts sank. I couldn’t lose her now. She was close. I could feel it. I felt her presence.

Out of the pod, I pressed my back against the coral wall and concentrated. Our mate bond had solidified since the first time I'd tried telepathic communication with Kendall. We'd joined our bodies, consummating our mating.

"Ahtu, I'm going to try communicating with Kendall through our bond. Guard me while I concentrate."

Ahtu nodded. "Reinforcements are coming."

"I've got something. She's there. Pray she senses me and responds," I said to Ahtu.

"Bourne, it's not a scouting mission," she murmured in my mind. "They're searching for me. The big, ugly one ordered a retrieval team."

"They're coming for you?" I asked her via our telepathic communication, my expression impassive.

She hesitated. "I think so. I'm much smaller than they are. Good luck finding me. They want what we have. Freedom, and what they can exploit." She went quiet before sharing her thoughts through the bond. "I'm in one of their abandoned escape tunnels. Tell me how to sabotage them from the inside while you and the warriors are on the outside."

"It's dangerous."

"I have to help. As your mate, it's my duty to prove myself worthy. I'm here. I'm in the belly of the beast. They won't expect it."

"You don't have to prove yourself."

Page 18

Source Creation Date: June 25, 2025, 7:06 am

I felt her smile through our bond. “It’s not about proving anything. I used the wrong word. It’s about protecting what matters. You, your people. Us.”

“Then return to me.” I sent her an image of the Trench creature’s communication system. “If you can, disable it.”

“I will.” She severed our connection.

“Ahtu, I did it. She heard me.” Pride filled my voice. “Kendall is going to destroy their communications while we take the breach.”

Ahtu handed me my father’s helmet. I slid it over my head and joined the battle below. He and I worked in tandem, darting between the invading creatures, our tridents slashing at their legs. We fought like men possessed.

“Bourne!” Ahtu screamed as an enormous creature chopped at his body with a partially severed claw.

I funneled inner electricity into my tentacles and shot over to him, wrapping my tentacles around the creature. I pulled with all my might, releasing the pent up shock down the creature’s spine. Its body seized as the electricity passed through its nervous system. I wrapped my humanoid legs around its neck and twisted. The creature’s neck snapped. As its body slackened, Ahtu pierced one of its eyes with his trident.

We joined the rest of the soldiers, fighting shoulder to shoulder. Waves of creatures emerged from the Trench, and we held them back. As I predicted, the water ran red.

A loud crack clapped over the commotions, and the creatures slowed, staggering. They wobbled, waving their weapons wildly, thrusting into empty space. Our warriors looked on in confusion, and I ordered them to continue the battle.

Cheers erupted from soldiers on the front lines as swaths of creatures crumbled and collapsed on the ground. Kendall had crippled their defenses.

I left the front line, swimming above the fray. I scanned for my mate from my position above the chaos, listening with my hearts instead of my eyes. An invisible thread connected us, and I rushed to her, knocking anyone who blocked my way to the side. She knelt on the seafloor, hands on her thighs. Her chest heaved from exertion. “Kendall? Are you injured?” I asked, pulling her close. “You kept your promise,” I whispered.

Clear blue eyes met mine. “I’m fine,” she grinned. “That’s something else you’ve learned about me. I always keep my promises.”

“My queen,” I said, kissing her forehead to see.

“Kendall, you have a visitor.” Bourne opened the door to the terrace.

“I do?” I sighed. I’d had a constant barrage of well-wishers after the incident.

“I have a gift for you,” a soft voice I recognized said.

“Eta?” I lowered my feet off the railing and raced to my friend, enveloping her in a hug.

Tears filled her eyes. “I was worried about you, my queen... Kendall. The whole time you were missing, we prayed to the gods for your safe return. Then Yubwyl heard from someone in the halls our king had gone to rescue you. You’re amazing. We’re so

happy you're home safe."

"I'm glad too."

Eta thrust a box into my hands. "A gift."

I placed the box on the table and pulled off the lid. "My tablet!"

"It works now. I think. At least it should." Eta's words rushed. "If it doesn't, I'm sorry."

"Thank you." I gave her another hug.

"I have to go back to the laboratory now, but I wanted to drop it off to you as soon as possible."

"Thank you." I walked her to the door. "I'll visit you soon."

"I'd like that," Eta said.

I wandered back to the terrace after pouring myself a drink. Bourne sat on the ledge overlooking the city and the grotto as we'd done two nights prior before everything changed. I climbed onto his lap and sipped at my drink, staring at the box.

"It was nice of her to come," he rumbled.

"Yes."

"What did she bring?" He pointed to the box.

“They think the tablet works.”

Bourne looked at me. “You seem hesitant.”

“What if...” I trailed off. “Bourne, do you think anyone will respond?”

“The only way to know for sure is if you try it.”

“What if they don’t answer?”

He wrapped his arms around me. “Then I’ll take you toward the surface and we’ll try to find them.”

I heaved a sigh. My fingers ran over the tablet and the back-light turned on. “Promising.” I typed in the codes we’d memorized before the mission. “Hello? Is anyone out there? It’s Kendall. I’m alive.”

Silence.

Bourne rubbed my back. “Now you know. Worth a try.”

Static crackled from the tablet. “Hello?” a feminine voice answered back.

I looked at Bourne, my eyes wide. “It worked.”

“Do you want me to take you back?”

I shook my head. “No. I belong here, with you.”