



Found (The Legion: Savage Lands Sector #6)

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Category: Fantasy

Description: One moment I was at a beach resort. The next, I was flailing through a jungle on an alien planet—and falling for the snarling catman who saved me.

All I wanted was a cocktail and a tan. What I got? A crash course in survival, one very growly alien pilot, and dreams that leave me breathless—and naked.

Zehn is a Rodinian Reaper, a lethal warrior with claws, fangs, and a purr that could melt titanium. He says we're fated. That the universe gifted me to him.

Then another alien shows up... and he's dreaming of me too.

Now I've got two growly, possessive aliens fighting to claim me—and I'm just trying not to die in the jungle.

Who knew fate had a sense of humor?

Found is part of the Legion: Savage Lands Sector series.

Total Pages (Source): 29

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 1:48 am

This was supposed to be my time to relax.

A fucking vacation. The kind where you sip fruity drinks with tiny umbrellas and forget that deadlines exist. But my brain refused to shut down, cycling through all the work piling up back home like a hamster on an espresso binge.

I adjusted my sunglasses and dug my toes deeper into the golden sand, trying to trick my body into relaxation while my mind spiraled through every unfinished project I'd abandoned.

The sun beat down on my skin, warming me to the bone, but the heat couldn't melt the knot of tension lodged between my shoulder blades.

Five days. I'd been here five days, and I still kept reaching for my phone every ten minutes, muscle memory searching for the device I'd locked in the hotel safe on day one. That's how pathetic I'd become.

Somewhere back home, my inbox was hemorrhaging requests. My team was probably drowning. My mother had likely called three times to ask if I'd be back in time for my cousin's baby shower—which, of course, I'd already said I would miss.

I exhaled slowly, watching the turquoise waves lap against the shoreline.

The resort sprawled behind me, white buildings gleaming in the sunlight, palm trees swaying in the gentle breeze.

Paradise, according to the travel agent.

A place where stress melted away and worries dissolved like sugar in hot coffee.

What a crock of shit.

I'd lain in this same spot for three hours, and the only thing dissolving was my patience. My shoulders ached from trying to force them to unclench. My jaw hurt from the grinding of teeth I couldn't seem to stop.

"Another drink, ma'am?" A shadow fell across my lounge, and I glanced up to see the cabana boy, all tanned limbs and practiced smile, balancing a tray of garishly colored concoctions.

I looked at my half-empty glass, condensation beading on the outside, the remnants of my third—or was it fourth?

—cocktail of the day. Mango and pineapple and enough rum to make my lips tingle.

The alcohol buzzed pleasantly through my veins, but even it couldn't quiet the constant chatter in my head.

"Maybe later," I said, stretching my arms overhead until something in my spine popped. "I think I'll take a walk first."

He nodded, professional smile never faltering, and moved on to the next sunbather.

I stood, brushing sand from my thighs, feeling the grains stick to my sunscreen-slick skin.

My red bikini, purchased specifically for this trip, felt foreign on my body.

I was more accustomed to button-ups and pencil skirts, armor for boardroom battles.

Fuck. Even on vacation, I couldn't stop thinking in war metaphors.

I grabbed my beach wrap, a flimsy thing with bright hibiscus flowers that had seemed so vacation-appropriate in the shop, and tied it around my waist. My legs—warming up toward that deep bronze that was closer to my natural skin tone rather than the sickly yellow I'd been thanks to my cave—stretched out beneath me, unsteady for a moment from the combination of alcohol and inactivity.

The resort grounds were manicured to perfection.

Not a palm frond out of place. Not a pebble disturbing the carefully raked sand pathways.

It was beautiful, but in the same way a stock photo was beautiful—perfect, sterile, devoid of character.

I followed one of these paths, away from the crowded beachfront, desperate for something real to look at.

The maintained grounds gave way to wilder growth as I walked.

Ferns unfurled in vibrant green spirals.

Flowers I couldn't name burst from within dense foliage in explosions of red and yellow.

Birds called to each other overhead, their songs nothing like the gentle ambient music piped through the resort's speakers.

This was better. Less controlled. My breathing slowed as I wandered deeper into the island's natural landscape, away from the artifice of relaxation and toward something

that didn't feel like it was trying so damn hard to be peaceful.

The path narrowed, then became little more than a game trail winding between increasingly dense vegetation.

I should have turned back. The rational part of my brain—the part that made me so good at my job—told me to stay where it was safe, where my cell phone would work if needed, where other humans could hear me if I called for help.

But the rum in my system and the restlessness in my bones pushed me forward.

Sweat beaded on my forehead and upper lip as the humidity thickened beneath the canopy. My beach sandals, never intended for actual walking, rubbed against my heels. I welcomed the discomfort. It felt honest, at least.

That's when I saw it.

A shimmer in the air, just beyond a break in the trees. Not heat rising from sun-baked ground. Not light filtering through leaves. This was different—a ripple, like someone had dropped a stone into the fabric of reality itself.

I froze, blinking hard, certain the alcohol was playing tricks on my vision.

The shimmer remained, hovering about six feet off the ground, a vertical oval of ...

nothing. No, not nothing. Something. The air within the ripple seemed both more and less substantial than the air around it, as if it were both incredibly dense and completely empty at the same time.

I should have run. I should have turned around and headed straight back to my lounge, ordered another drink, and forgotten I ever saw anything.

Instead, I stepped closer, curiosity overriding self-preservation.

The shimmer pulsed, almost imperceptibly, a gentle rhythm like a heartbeat. I reached out a hand, not quite touching it, feeling a strange coolness emanating from the anomaly. No heat. No sound. Just that impossible ripple, defying everything I knew about how the world was supposed to work.

“What the hell are you?” I whispered, the words barely audible even to my own ears.

As if in response, the shimmer expanded slightly, its edges softening, becoming less defined. I leaned closer, my face inches from the phenomenon, trying to see what lay beyond it. There was something there—a darkness, a depth that shouldn’t exist in open air.

My foot moved forward of its own accord, sandal toeing the ground just beneath the ripple. One more step and I’d be directly beneath it.

One more step.

The instant my body crossed the threshold, the world collapsed.

There’s no other way to describe it. Reality folded in on itself, compressing around me with crushing force. I couldn’t breathe, couldn’t scream, couldn’t think. My entire being was squeezed through a space too small to contain it, every molecule of my body screaming in protest.

Colors I’d never seen before—colors that couldn’t exist—flashed behind my eyelids. My ears popped painfully, pressure building and releasing in waves. My skin felt like it was being simultaneously frozen and burned, nerve endings firing in confused panic.

And then—WHUMP.

I hit the ground hard, the impact driving whatever air remained in my lungs out in one painful burst. For several seconds, all I could do was lie there, stunned, my brain struggling to process what had just happened.

Gradually, sensation returned. Damp soil beneath my palms. Humid air filling my lungs. The distant sound of ...something ...chirping? No, not chirping. Nothing so familiar. This was a higher pitch, more mechanical, like metal scraping against metal but somehow organic.

I forced my eyes open.

The beach was gone. The resort was gone. Earth was gone.

I pushed myself up onto my elbows, my hands sinking into ground that felt wrong—spongier than soil should be, with a strange elasticity that made my skin crawl.

Between my splayed fingers, tiny filaments pulsed with bioluminescent light, a network of glowing veins running through the ground like a living circuit board.

“No,” I whispered, the word catching in my throat. “No, no, no.”

I scrambled to my feet, swaying as my equilibrium struggled to adjust. Above me, massive trees stretched toward a sky that was absolutely, undeniably not the sky I knew.

It was darker, tinged with violet hues, yet still somehow daylight.

Stars—or what I assumed were stars—were visible despite the light, pinpricks of blue

and green rather than white.

The trees themselves were wrong. Their trunks twisted in impossible geometries, bark rippling with slow, deliberate movement like breathing.

The leaves—if you could call them leaves—were deep purple, almost black at the edges, and they hung in clusters that seemed to track my movement, turning slightly as I staggered backward.

My heart hammered against my ribs, each beat so forceful it felt like it might crack bone. Sweat broke out across my forehead, down my back, my body's panic response kicking into overdrive.

This isn't happening. This isn't real. I'm dreaming. I passed out from the heat. Food poisoning. Something.

But the ground beneath my feet felt too solid. The air I gulped down was too thick, too sweet, coating my tongue with a flavor like overripe fruit. And the sounds—the alien cacophony of life forms I couldn't begin to comprehend—were too varied, too complex to be products of my imagination.

I turned in a slow circle, searching desperately for the shimmer, the ripple, the way back. Nothing. Just more jungle in every direction, vegetation that defied categorization, colors that hurt to look at.

BZZZZZZZZT.

I froze, the sound cutting through my panic like a blade. It came from behind me, close enough that I could feel the vibration in my teeth, a frequency that set my nerves on edge.

Slowly—so, so slowly—I turned.

And found myself face-to-face with an insect.

No, not an insect. Insects weren't the size of dinner plates. Insects didn't have crystalline wings that refracted light into impossible spectra. Insects didn't have what appeared to be fucking eyestalks that tracked independently of each other, focusing and unfocusing as they examined me.

We stared at each other, the creature and I, in a moment of mutual assessment. Its mandibles—six of them, arranged in a circular pattern—clicked together in what might have been curiosity or hunger or aggression.

I swallowed hard.

The creature's wings twitched, vibrating faster.

And then it lunged.

I screamed, a primal sound torn from deep in my chest, and flung myself backward. My arms pinwheeled wildly, smacking at the air as if I could somehow beat back this nightmare with bare hands. The creature dodged easily, its movements fluid and precise, clearly evolved for aerial combat.

I spun around, desperate to put distance between us, and promptly tripped over an exposed root—except it wasn't a root. It moved, curling away from my foot like a tentacle, and I crashed headlong into what I thought was a tree.

The tree moved.

I screamed again as the trunk—no, the limb—shifted beneath my hands, bark sliding

against bark with a sound like grinding stones. Something slithered down from above, a sinuous appendage that might have been a branch or a vine or something else entirely, reaching for me with deliberate purpose.

Pure instinct took over. I ran.

I crashed through the alien undergrowth, branches—or what I hoped were branches—whipping past my face.

Ferns twice my height unfurled as I approached, their fronds curling away to reveal pulsing centers that emitted clouds of iridescent spores.

I held my breath as I plunged through, praying whatever they released wasn't toxic to human lungs.

The giant insect followed, its buzz growing and fading as it darted through the canopy above me, tracking my panicked flight with predatory patience.

Something howled in the distance—a long, low sound that started in a register I could hear and descended into one I could only feel as vibration in my chest. Whatever made that noise was big. Bigger than the insect. Bigger than me.

I ran faster, my lungs burning, the uneven ground treacherous beneath my feet.

My beach sandals, now slick with alien dew, slipped with every step.

My beach wrap had long since been torn away, leaving me in nothing but my bikini, skin exposed to whatever invisible dangers lurked in this impossible place.

I didn't see the dropoff until it was too late.

One moment I was running, the next there was nothing beneath my leading foot but empty air. My stomach lurched as I pitched forward, a startled yelp escaping my lips. Then I was falling, tumbling down a steep incline, my body bouncing against roots and rocks and things I couldn't name.

Pain exploded across my shoulder, my hip, my head as I rolled. Dirt and debris filled my mouth, bitter and strange. I clawed at the ground, trying to slow my descent, but it was useless.

After what felt like an eternity, I landed in a heap at the bottom of the ravine, splayed out like a broken doll. For a moment, all I could do was lie there, every part of me throbbing in protest, staring up at the alien sky with its impossible colors and unfamiliar stars.

I inhaled deeply, tasting blood where I'd bitten my tongue.

I exhaled slowly, feeling the press of strange soil against my back.

"I hate this vacation."

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 1:48 am

The scent of burning plasma filled my cockpit, thick and acrid, curling in the air like the dying breath of a beast. I bared my fangs, adjusting my grip on the controls of my Reaper Prowler as enemy fire strafed past me, the heat rippling across my shields.

My targeting systems screamed warnings, red flashing sigils marking multiple bogies closing in.

Ambush.

I curled my tail tightly against my seat as I dove hard, cutting between the debris of a destroyed freighter. My Rodinian instincts sharpened, my battle focus narrowing to a pinpoint. The fur along my spine bristled with anticipation.

They had thought they could outmaneuver a Reaper.

They had been wrong.

I twisted, rolling the Prowler into a tight spin, letting the ship's sleek wings slice through the wreckage field.

The g-force pressed against my muscled frame, but my body—built for the hunt across generations of evolution—absorbed it without strain.

I was on them in a breath, claws tapping a rhythm on my console as I locked onto the closest fighter.

A purr rumbled in my chest as I fired, my plasma cannons tearing through the enemy

ship in a spray of molten wreckage. The explosion bloomed against the void, a beautiful death that satisfied the predator in me.

One down.

My ears flicked forward, catching the subtle changes in the engine's pitch as I banked hard, already seeking the next target. These ambushers—pirates or mercenaries, it didn't matter—thought they had cornered prey. They didn't realize they had attracted a hunter.

But before I could shift to the next target, my sensors shrieked in alarm. The sound grated against my sensitive ears, and I flattened them instinctively against my skull.

An attack from above—a second ambush.

I threw my Prowler into a defensive spiral, my claws extending and retracting with tension as I worked the controls.

But the enemy's trajectory was already set.

The first hit shook my ship, rattling my bones.

The second overloaded my shields, the protective barrier crackling and dying in a flash of blue energy.

The third—a direct shot to my wing—sent me spinning out of control.

I snarled, baring my fangs at the empty space before me as my systems went dark. Warning lights bathed the cockpit in crimson. The emergency power kicked in, but it was too late for recovery. Too late for anything but survival.

Rodinians did not fear death.

But this?

This was unacceptable.

I forced my voice through the crackling comms. “Zehn to Legion Command. I’ve been hit. Going down.” My voice remained steady, betraying none of the rage coursing through my veins. Legion Reapers didn’t show weakness, even when falling to their deaths.

No response.

Just silence.

Damn it.

With a violent jolt, my ship broke through the atmosphere of the unknown planet below. The Prowler’s hull screamed as it tore through the upper layers, friction building until the temperature gauges exploded in a shower of sparks.

Heat ignited across my hull, flames licking at my wings as I fought to stabilize my descent. The jungle world rushed up to meet me, the terrain a blur of violet trees and glowing rivers. Strange, alien landscape. Unknown threats.

I had seconds.

Reaching for the emergency release, I punched out, my body ripped from the Prowler as the escape systems launched me away from the wreckage. The force slammed against my chest, crushing the air from my lungs as I was ejected into open sky.

For a moment, I was weightless, suspended between death and survival as I hurtled toward the surface. The wind tore at my armor, whipping against my fur. The planet's scent hit me—rich soil, unfamiliar flora, the tang of minerals I couldn't name.

The impact was brutal.

I hit the ground hard, rolling through tangled underbrush before my body finally skidded to a stop. My claws dug deep furrows in the earth as I tried to halt my momentum. Pain lanced through my shoulder, my ribs, my thigh—nothing broken, but battered to hell.

Everything ached.

My vision swam, my muscles burned as I forced myself upright. The scent of smoke and scorched metal filled my nostrils. In the distance, my ship—my Prowler—was nothing but flaming wreckage, a funeral pyre for advanced technology.

Gone.

I exhaled sharply, running a quick body check. My claws slid carefully over my limbs, testing for major injuries. My tail lashed behind me, still responsive despite the pain. I wiped blood from my muzzle—a minor cut compared to what could have been.

Bruised, battered, but alive.

That would have to be enough.

My ears flicked as the jungle around me stirred. This planet was alive with sound—creatures chittering in the canopy above, the rustle of vegetation in the breeze, the distant call of something large and likely dangerous.

Strange, humid air. The low pulse of unseen creatures watching from the shadows. The light here was different—a lavender tinge to the atmosphere that made my fur look purple where it should have been gold.

No immediate threats. That was something.

I scanned the horizon, marking the location of my crash. The sun—larger and paler than I was used to—was descending. Night would bring its own dangers. I would need rest before I could plan my next move.

Using my claws, I climbed the nearest tree—easily twenty spans high, thick and sturdy. My Rodinian heritage served me well; my ancestors had hunted from the high branches of ancient forests. My claws sank into the bark, finding purchase even in this alien wood.

It would hold my weight. My people had been built for the hunt, for the prowl, but even the strongest hunter needed rest.

I wedged myself in the crook of the massive tree's branches, tail coiling loosely around the limb for stability. My back pressed against the trunk, giving me a clear view of the surroundings. From here, I could spot any approach, any danger.

Survival protocols engaged automatically. I steadied my breathing, letting my enhanced senses catalog this new environment. Threat assessment. Resource identification. Escape routes.

But exhaustion tugged at me, the adrenaline of battle and crash fading to leave bone-deep weariness. My eyelids grew heavy, my muscles relaxing incrementally as I let my body heal itself.

Sleep came swiftly.

And with it?—

The dream.

Water.

Sunlight had kissed the surface of a shimmering lagoon, golden rays rippling across sapphire blue. The air had been thick with the scent of sweet citrus, lush flowers in bloom. This wasn't the violet jungle I had crashed in—this was somewhere else entirely. Somewhere perfect.

And her.

I saw her—a female unlike any I had known.

She stood at the water's edge, her skin warm as bronze, soft as silk.

Dark, shining hair spilled down her back, curling slightly at the ends.

Her body was smaller than mine, curved in ways that made my pulse quicken.

Her scent carried to me on the breeze—a tantalizing mix of sweetness and musk that made my cock stir against my leathers.

She turned, her eyes finding mine, and she giggled.

A soft, teasing sound. A lure.

My body reacted instantly, instincts sharpening. My pupils dilated, my nostrils flared. Every muscle tensed, ready to spring.

Terran.

I knew her species, though it had been centuries since Rodinians had traded with Terra Prime. The old alliances were distant memories, faded records buried in Legion archives.

Yet there she was.

My mate.

I knew it with absolute certainty. The recognition burned in my blood, a primal knowledge that transcended rational thought. She belonged to me. I belonged to her. It had been written in the code of my genes, in the ancient magic of my people.

She laughed again, daring me to chase.

So I did.

I lunged, my body powerful and fast, leaping over smooth stones and mossy earth, following the sound of her breath, the warmth of her presence. My tail extended behind me for balance as I moved on all fours, covering ground with predatory efficiency.

She ran—but only to tempt me, her pace playful, meant to be caught. Her bare feet barely touched the ground as she darted between trees, glancing over her shoulder to ensure I followed.

And I did.

I caught her at the edge of the lagoon, sweeping her up as she gasped, her legs wrapping around my waist instinctively. Her skin was hot against mine, her small

hands pressing against my chest, feeling the coarse fur that covered my torso.

She was perfect.

I pressed her down onto the sun-warmed stone, her body arching as I held her beneath me, my claws lightly tracing her curves.

I was careful not to break her delicate skin as I explored her, learning the terrain of my mate's body.

She was so much smaller than me, so much more fragile, yet I sensed her strength.

She sighed my name. Zehn .

The sound made my blood burn, my cock throbbed painfully against my leathers. I'd never heard my name spoken with such want, such need. It had made the beast inside me roar with triumph.

I lowered my head, tasting her skin, dragging my tongue in long, slow strokes along her collarbone, down between her breasts, tracing the delicate lines of her abdomen. Her flavor was intoxicating—salt and sweetness mixed with something uniquely her own.

She trembled, her scent intensifying, her body pliant beneath me. Her hands moved to my shoulders, nails digging into my fur as I tasted more of her. I growled against her skin, the vibration making her squirm beneath me.

I spread her thighs with my hands, exposing her to me, and her breath hitched. She was wet, glistening, her body preparing itself for mine. The scent of her arousal made me dizzy with want.

“Please,” she whispered, and it was the sweetest command I had ever received.

My mouth found her.

She gasped, her hips bucking as I feasted on her, tasting the salt of her sweat, the honeyed musk of her arousal. My rough tongue explored her folds, circling her clit with deliberate pressure. I held her thighs apart, keeping her open to me as I devoured her.

Her cries filled the jungle, her fingers gripping my hair as she came, her body shaking beneath my tongue. I drank her in, greedy for every drop, every tremor, every sound she made.

But I wasn't finished.

I moved over her, locking her gaze with mine, holding her down as I freed myself from my leathers. My cock sprung free, thick and heavy, the head already slick with pre-cum. Her eyes widened at the sight of me, but there was no fear—only hunger.

“You're mine,” I growled, my voice rough with desire.

“Yes,” she agreed, spreading her legs wider. “Yours.”

I positioned myself at her entrance, the blunt head of my cock pressing against her wetness. With one slow thrust, I slid inside.

She was tight, wet, utterly mine, her body made to take me, to hold me, to claim me as hers. The sensation nearly undid me—the perfect heat of her, the way she gripped me from within.

Her nails raked down my back, dragging through my fur to reach the skin beneath.

The slight pain only intensified my pleasure, making me thrust deeper.

I growled, my hips snapping forward, burying myself fully inside her, and she shattered around me. Her walls clenched tight, pulsing around my length as she came again, crying out my name like a prayer.

I set a relentless pace, claiming her over and over, my claws digging into the stone on either side of her head. The slap of flesh against flesh, the wet sounds of our joining, the mingled scent of our arousal—it was perfect. Primal. Everything.

My name on her lips?—

My mate beneath me?—

The universe aligning in one perfect moment?—

I roared as my release built, my thrusts becoming erratic, more forceful. She took everything I gave her, urging me on with whispered pleas and broken moans. When I finally came, it was with a shattering force that tore through me, emptying me into her welcoming body in hot spurts.

I woke with a snarl, my body rock-hard, drenched in sweat and my own release.

For a long moment, I panted, my chest heaving, my heart slamming against my ribs. The reality of my situation returned slowly—the alien jungle, the crash, the isolation.

But the dream remained vivid, seared into my memory with perfect clarity.

The dream had been real.

Not a fantasy. Not an illusion.

Rodinians only shared dreams with their fate-mates—a truth written in our blood, in our bones, in our very souls. It was our most sacred connection, the way our ancestors had found their perfect matches across vast distances.

She was here.

Beyond all logic, beyond all reason.

There should have been no humans for light years in any direction. The odds of finding a fate-mate on a random planet after a crash was astronomically small.

And yet?—

My mate was on this planet.

Waiting for me.

I bared my fangs, a slow, satisfied growl rumbling deep in my chest. My purpose was clear now, my path forward certain in a way it hadn't been moments before.

I would find her.

And nothing— nothing —would take her from me.

I checked my gear, assessing what had survived the crash. My combat knife was still secured to my thigh. The emergency beacon on my wrist was functional, though who knew when the Legion might receive it. My armor had protected me from the worst of the impact.

It would have to be enough.

The light was fading as night approached, but I wouldn't wait for morning. Every moment separated from my mate felt like agony now that I knew she existed. I dropped from the tree, landing in a silent crouch, my senses alert.

I raised my head, testing the air for her scent. Nothing yet, but the dream had given me purpose. The lagoon, the specific flora—these would be my guides.

I moved through the alien jungle with renewed strength, my fatigue forgotten, my injuries ignored.

My mate waited.

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Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 1:48 am

I woke up breathless, tangled in sweat-damp clothes, my body thrumming with aftershocks of pleasure that refused to fade.

The dream clung to me like a second skin, vivid and intense—golden eyes watching me, massive hands exploring my body, and that deep, rumbling purr vibrating against my skin as he'd claimed me.

I pressed my thighs together, embarrassment and arousal warring for dominance as I tried to shake off the lingering effects of the most erotic dream I'd ever experienced.

My body still quivered, sensitive and wanting.

I groaned, covering my face with my hands.

This was ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous.

Here I was, stranded on some godforsaken alien planet after my “relaxing vacation shuttle” had malfunctioned, and my brain decided now was the perfect time for vivid alien sex dreams?

“Get it together, Everly,” I muttered, forcing myself to sit up.

I'd had dreams before—normal ones, boring ones, even the occasional sexy encounter with actors or ex-boyfriends.

But this? This had been a full sensory experience.

I could still feel the press of his tongue, the weight of his massive body covering mine, the way his claws had gently scraped along my skin.

A shiver ran through me, heat pooling between my legs all over again. Damn it. I did not need to be turned on while lost in an alien jungle.

But my body wasn't listening to reason. I slid my hand between my thighs, biting my lip as the memory of the dream slammed into me—those piercing golden eyes, his broad striped chest, the way he'd growled praise against my ear as he'd?—

I gasped, arching as release hit me fast and hard, pleasure cresting through my body in waves. It was sharp, quick, and satisfying enough to leave me boneless against the makeshift bed of leaves I'd gathered.

And slightly mortified. What was wrong with me? Trauma-fueled alien sex fantasies? Was that a thing? If it was, I definitely needed therapy when—if—I ever made it back to Earth.

Sighing, I pushed myself up on shaky legs. I needed to clean up and get moving. Staying in one place too long wasn't safe. I'd learned that the hard way on my second day here when something with too many teeth had tried to make me its dinner.

I gathered my few salvaged belongings and pushed through the thick underbrush, seeking out the sound of running water I'd heard the night before.

The jungle around me pulsed with alien life—massive ferns that shifted away from my touch, iridescent insects that hummed with metallic tones, trees with bark that seemed to breathe in the early morning light.

After a few minutes of stumbling through dense foliage, I found a small water hole, clear and shimmering, morning light dappling over its surface. Perfect.

I crouched at the edge, splashing cool water onto my face, trying to wash away the lingering heat from my dream. Not helping. The memory of a sun-warmed lagoon flashed in my mind—the exact setting from my dream, where he'd stalked me through crystal waters before catching me against smooth stones.

“Stop it,” I groaned, dunking my head under the water to silence my thoughts.

Focus, Everly. Survival first. Alien fantasy psychoanalysis later.

When I surfaced, I shook out my hair, squared my shoulders, and turned to leave?—

And came face-to-face with a very large, very fanged, very alien lizard.

I froze, my heart stuttering to a halt before slamming into overdrive.

It was not a normal lizard. It had six legs. Six thick, muscled, clawed legs and way too many teeth arranged in multiple rows behind lips that pulled back in what could only be described as a predatory smile.

I made a choking sound, somewhere between a gasp and a scream.

The lizard hissed, its vertical pupils fixed on me, its mottled green-and-black hide rippling as it tensed.

Oh, hell no.

I bolted, sprinting for my life. The jungle blurred around me as I ran, branches whipping against my arms and face, vines catching at my ankles. The sound of thundering footsteps crashed behind me, gaining with every second.

The lizard was fast—unnaturally fast for something that large. I could hear it closing

the distance, feel the ground trembling beneath its weight with each pounding step.

My lungs burned, muscles screaming as I pushed myself harder. I ducked under a low-hanging branch, leapt over a fallen trunk, desperate to put something, anything between me and those teeth.

And then?—

A roar split the air.

Loud. Deafening. Primal.

A shadow launched from above, tackling the lizard mid-charge.

The jungle exploded into chaos. Snarls, screeches, the sound of ripping flesh and breaking bones filled the air. I stumbled, slamming into a tree, barely able to process what was happening.

Because the thing that had just dropped from the trees like a goddamn superhero was...

Was...

Oh.

Oh shit.

He was huge—at least seven and a half feet of corded muscle, deadly claws, and golden fur striped with black.

His powerful body moved with fluid grace as he tore into the lizard, his cat-like ears

flattened against his skull, thick tail lashing in agitation.

Razor-sharp fangs gleamed as he ripped through the predator's hide like it was paper.

My brain short-circuited, unable to process what I was seeing.

It's him. The alien from my dream.

I barely had time to register that impossible fact before his head snapped toward me, nostrils flaring, pupils expanding to dark pools rimmed with gold. His bloodied claws flexed at his sides.

Instinct screamed at me to run.

I did the next best thing.

I grabbed a rock and hurled it at his head with all my strength.

He dodged it easily, almost lazily, a rumbling sound vibrating from his chest that—horrifyingly—sounded amused. Then he moved, lightning-fast, closing the distance between us before I could even think to run.

I yelped, scrambling backward, but his massive hands caught me, lifting me off the ground like I weighed nothing at all. I shrieked, kicking wildly, smacking ineffectually at his chest.

“Let me go! You big—striped—murder-cat!”

If he understood me, he didn't show it. Instead, he hauled me up against his chest, rumbling something in his deep, purring alien voice that sent unwanted shivers down my spine.

He tucked me securely against him with one arm, my feet dangling uselessly off the ground, and carried me away like a prize he'd won.

And all I could think, through the panic and the fear, was how his touch felt exactly like it had in my dream.

He didn't eat me. So that was a plus in the "stranded on an alien planet" survival guide.

Instead, after carrying me for what felt like miles through the dense jungle, my feline captor brought me to what remained of a ship—the kind you'd see in high-end military catalogs back on Earth, all sleek curves and menacing angles.

Or at least, it would have been impressive before whatever catastrophe had turned it into a blackened husk of twisted metal embedded in scorched earth.

"A ship," I breathed, hope flickering to life despite the obvious state of the wreckage. "You have a ship."

The alien finally set me down, his massive hands lingering on my waist a moment longer than necessary.

I scrambled away from him, putting a healthy distance between us as I assessed my surroundings.

The crash site was a disaster zone—debris scattered in a wide radius, the earth torn up and scorched black.

The ship itself was barely recognizable as a vessel, its hull ripped open and charred, the cockpit a mess of shattered glass and mangled controls.

The alien's ears twitched toward me at the sound of my voice. His golden eyes—the same eyes from my dream, a fact I was desperately trying to ignore—fixed on me with unnerving intensity. He made a low rumbling sound in his chest, then gestured toward the wreckage with a clawed hand.

I turned back to the ship, hope rapidly fading as I took a closer look.

The engines were completely destroyed, twisted hunks of metal that would never fire again.

The navigation systems were exposed to the elements, wires dangling uselessly.

Even the emergency beacons appeared damaged beyond repair.

This thing wasn't flying anywhere. Not now, not ever.

My heart sank as reality settled heavy on my shoulders. I wasn't getting off this planet with this ship.

"Great," I muttered, slumping against a nearby boulder. "Just great. Stranded on an alien planet with a wrecked ship and a giant cat-man who might decide I'm dinner after all."

The alien appeared unbothered by my distress. He moved with confident purpose toward the ship, stepping through a jagged tear in the hull. I watched him disappear inside, tensing as I considered making a run for it.

But where would I go? Back to the jungle with the six-legged lizards? Not exactly a promising alternative.

So I waited, hugging my knees to my chest, trying to sort through the impossible

situation I found myself in—particularly the fact that the alien who'd just saved me was identical to the one who'd ...well ...done considerably more intimate things to me in my dream.

The alien emerged from the wreckage a few minutes later, holding something small and metallic in his massive hand. The device gleamed in the sunlight, clearly undamaged despite the state of the ship. It looked vaguely medical—like a cross between a hypodermic injector and a diagnostic tool.

He approached me with determined strides, the device held out in front of him.

I leaned back, pressing against the boulder. “Nope. Nuh-uh. Not happening.”

His eyes narrowed, tail flicking in obvious irritation. He took another step closer, towering over me.

I crossed my arms over my chest, glaring up at him. “I feel fine, thank you very much. Don't need whatever alien drugs you're pushing.”

And then—he purred.

The sound was nothing like a house cat's gentle vibration. This was deep, resonant, a physical force that rolled through my bones and settled warm and heavy in my chest. My muscles relaxed involuntarily, my brain suddenly fuzzy around the edges.

“That's cheating,” I murmured, struggling to maintain my defensive posture.

Taking advantage of my momentary weakness, he moved with lightning speed. One large hand cradled the back of my head while the other pressed the device against my neck.

I yelped as a sharp pinch shot through my skin, followed by a brief burning sensation that spread outward like liquid fire before quickly fading.

“You asshole!” I swatted at his arm, scowling up at him. “You don’t just go around injecting people with random alien tech! There are rules about this kind of—”

“There now. Not so bad, kitten.”

I froze. The world tilted sideways.

My heart stopped beating.

My stomach plummeted straight through my feet.

Because I had understood every single word.

Every. Single. Word.

Slowly, I tilted my head up, mouth hanging open in shock.

The alien cat-man smirked down at me, satisfaction written across his feline features. His golden eyes glowed with amusement, his lips curved to reveal the tips of deadly fangs.

“Now we can talk,” he said, his purring voice rich and deep, exactly as it had been in my dream.

My head spun with impossible questions. How could I understand him? What had he injected me with? And most importantly—how was he the same alien from my dream?

I opened my mouth, closed it, then opened it again.

“Who—what—” I stammered, backing away from him. “What did you do to me?”

His smirk widened into something dangerous and thrilling.

“Just a universal translator. Standard issue for the Legion.” He took a step closer, his massive form blocking out the sun.

“The real question, little human, is what are you doing so far from your home planet? And why—” his nostrils flared as he leaned closer, “—do you smell like my mate?”

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The transformation rippled through me, my battle rage subsiding as bones and muscles shifted beneath my skin.

I exhaled, a low growl escaping as my claws retracted and my height diminished by those crucial two feet that separated my daily form from the killing machine I'd just unleashed on the forest predator that dared approach what was mine.

Standing over the shredded remains of the jungle cat, my eyes found her—the human female who'd appeared from nowhere and changed everything with a single scent.

The shift came swiftly, muscles realigning, my body shrinking slightly as my claws and fangs retracted. I exhaled sharply, shaking out my limbs, the last remnants of my battle form fading as my instincts calmed.

It had been a close call. Too close.

The universal truth rang through my blood, as absolute and unyielding as the stars themselves: Never get between a Rodinian and his mate.

If I'd had any doubt about what the dream had meant, it was destroyed the moment I tore that creature apart and gathered her into my arms.

She was real.

She was here.

And she was mine.

I watched her now, standing a few paces away, her back pressed against the rough bark of a massive tree.

Her chest rose and fell rapidly, eyes wide with shock, fear, and something else—something that made my fur stand on end with anticipation.

She wore only the tattered remains of what must have been sleeping attire—small, thin straps of cloth that left little to the imagination.

The beast within me growled with approval.

“What—what are you?” she whispered, her voice cracking slightly.

I tilted my head, considering her question. “I am Zehn Varrek Tol’Vekkar,” I said, my voice still rough from the transformation. “I am Rodinian. Legion Reaper.”

“Rodianian,” she repeated, testing the word on her tongue. “And what’s a Legion Reaper?”

I allowed my lips to curl into the barest hint of a smile. “We are the elite hunters. The finest warriors. The shadows that strike when diplomacy fails.”

“You’re a soldier,” she translated, some of the tension easing from her shoulders.

“I am much more than that, little one,” I rumbled, my tail flicking behind me. “But yes, that is close enough.”

She swallowed hard, her gaze flicking to the mangled corpse of the predator I’d dispatched.

The creature had been stalking her for half a mile—a six-legged feline native to this

miserable rock, with poisonous barbs along its spine and jaws that could crush bone.

I'd picked up its scent long before it made its move.

The moment it had lunged, I'd been between it and my mate, my transformation triggered by instinct and rage.

I took in every inch of her, marveling at how the universe had gifted me.

Soft bronzed skin, smooth and rich like polished copper.

Long, dark hair, thick as silk, curling slightly at the ends.

Deep brown eyes—dark with fire, with spirit, with challenge.

My tail flicked, my nostrils flaring as I inhaled her scent, warm and utterly intoxicating.

Beautiful.

Fierce.

My mate.

And she was here.

Against all logic, against all the probabilities, she had appeared on this world, alone, unprotected, and completely unaware of her fate.

A miracle.

A temptation.

A dangerous distraction.

She shifted slightly, crossing her arms, her bare skin catching the light in a way that tested every ounce of control I possessed.

I wanted to cover her.

With my body.

With my scent, my mark, my claim.

Instead, I focused on the mystery at hand.

“How did you come to be here, kitten?” I asked, watching as her eyes flicked up to mine.

She hesitated, frowning slightly. “I ...I don’t know,” she admitted. “I was on Earth. One moment, I was at a resort, and then—” she gestured vaguely at the jungle. “This.”

Earth.

Terra Prime.

A world on the opposite side of the galaxy.

I hissed, the sound low and contemplative.

Damned smugglers.

The Solarian Corridor—or, as the Legion called it, the Savage Lands Sector—was a haven for criminals, a black market hub where laws meant nothing.

The slums of space.

The perfect place for disappearances.

Had she been taken?

Sold?

No. She was too confused. If she had been captured and trafficked, she would have expected danger, not wandered lost and barefoot through an alien jungle.

Still, I did not like it.

“You’re not from here,” she said suddenly, her gaze sharp as she studied me. “You crashed. I saw your ship.”

The memory of my Prowler spiraling through the atmosphere flashed through my mind—systems failing, engines screaming, the planet’s surface rushing up to meet me. I’d barely managed to maintain enough control to avoid being spread across half the continent.

“Yes,” I confirmed. “A Reaper class Prowler. I was on a reconnaissance mission when I picked up an anomalous signal.”

Her brows furrowed. “A signal? From what?”

“I am not sure. This planet was not on any of my star charts,” I gestured to the jungle around us.

“There were bogies on my tail, strafed my ship, and despite the anti-grav lock, my Prowler still went down.” As if there were a trap laid for it specifically, but I kept my speculations to myself. No need to worry my mate unnecessarily.

Mate.

Finding one’s fate-mate was the closest thing to religion that Rodinia had. A fated mate was so uncommon that many of my kind had given up hope. Many Rodinians have chosen heart mates, if they choose to be mated at all.

Yet here she was.

“Despite the mystery, I cannot help but be grateful. I would never expect to have found my fate-mate in such a place.”

“That’s ...that can’t be right,” she said, shaking her head. “I’m human. You’re ...not.”

I chuckled, the sound rumbling deep in my chest. “The universe cares little for such distinctions when it decides to knit souls together, kitten.”

“My name is Everly,” she said with unexpected steel in her voice. “Not kitten.”

“Everly,” I repeated, savoring the taste of her name. “Everly Flores.”

Her eyes widened. “How did you?—”

“I know many things about you, now” I said, tapping my temple. “The unity dream unlocks our soul’s bond.”

The look of confusion over her face made her even more adorable. All I wanted to do

was hold her close and nuzzle her neck until I was drunk with her scent.

First things first.

I needed to secure proper shelter for my mate.

Then, find a way off this rock.

A Reaper's work was never done.

I glanced in the direction of my crashed Prowler, calculating the chances of getting the communicator working.

It was reparable—but it would take time.

Time we might not have.

“I saw something while I was crashing,” I said, my ears flicking in thought. “A location that did not ping on my systems.”

Her brows furrowed. “Meaning?”

“A black site.” My tail flicked. “If it was undetectable, it may have been abandoned.”

I hoped it was abandoned. If not...

I would deal with it.

She bit her lip, shifting slightly. “I can help?—”

“No.”

Her head snapped up, fire in her gaze. “Excuse me?”

I narrowed my eyes, stepping closer. “First, you are barely covered,” I rumbled, my voice dipping lower as her skin flushed. “It is taking all my control not to cover you myself.”

Her lips parted, and for a brief second, her breath hitched—as if she wasn’t entirely opposed to the idea.

I inhaled slowly, savoring the shift in her scent before continuing.

“Second, you are soft,” I said, reaching out and brushing my knuckles lightly down her arm. Her flesh dimpled at my touch, and a pleased rumble escaped my chest.

Her eyes widened, her breath quickening.

Good.

She felt the pull, too.

She just didn’t know it yet.

I leaned down, my voice a rough whisper. “And third, it is my role to protect my mate.”

Her expression flickered between shock and indignation, and then?—

An insect buzzed too close.

She screamed and swatted wildly, stumbling backward.

I barely contained my chuckle as she railed at the air, cursing in her native tongue.

Spirits, she is adorable.

I caught her before she could trip over her own feet, drawing her flush against my chest.

She stiffened, her heart thudding against my ribs.

I rumbled deep in my throat, the sound low and steady, meant to soothe, to calm.

Her body relaxed immediately, melting against mine.

Her breath slowed.

My purr deepened.

Perfect.

“I am not your mate,” she mumbled against my chest. “I don’t even know what that means.”

“You will,” I promised, breathing in her scent. “For now, you need rest. Food. Safety.”

“I need to go home,” she countered, though there was little force behind the words.

“And I will help you discover how you came to be here,” I assured her. “But first—shelter.”

The jungle was growing darker, the twin suns of this forsaken planet sinking below

the horizon. Night brings dangers in every wilderness, and this one was no exception. I could feel the fatigue in her body, the way she leaned against me despite her protests.

“You’re exhausted,” I said, not a question but a statement.

“I’ve been walking for hours,” she admitted. “Before you found me. Before that ...thing attacked.”

I nodded. “The predators will be more active soon. We need to find safety.”

She pulled back slightly, looking up at me with those impossibly deep eyes. “Why are you helping me?”

The question surprised me. “You are mine to protect,” I said simply.

“I am not yours,” she insisted, though her voice lacked conviction.

“The universe disagrees,” I said with finality.

When her lashes fluttered closed, I lifted her gently, carrying her through the trees until I found a suitable copse—tall, wide-barked sentinels, their thick branches woven like a cradle.

She didn’t protest, her head nestled against my shoulder, her breathing already evening out. The stress and fear of her ordeal were catching up to her.

I set her down carefully, constructing an easy shelter, weaving broad leaves together to form an insulated roof.

A temporary den.

Once satisfied, I activated a small force shield—a protective barrier meant to keep unwanted creatures out while allowing air to pass through.

Only then did I leave, moving swiftly and silently through the jungle, my ears twitching at every sound.

I hunted. Gathered.

Brought back provisions, stowing them high where scavengers could not reach.

The smaller creatures of the forest posed little challenge. I returned with meat, fruit, and clean water from a nearby stream. I arranged them near our shelter, saving the bulk for morning.

Everly had not moved from where I'd placed her, her body curled on the soft ground covering I'd fashioned from fallen leaves and moss. Her breathing was deep and even, her face peaceful in sleep.

I stood guard for a time, my senses alert for any danger. But the forest seemed to understand that this territory was now claimed—marked by my scent, by my presence.

When I was certain all was secure, I settled beside her, my body curved protectively around her smaller form.

And then—I curled my body around her, sheltering her with my warmth.

She sighed in her sleep, shifting closer to my chest, her scent twining around me.

I exhaled slowly, eager for sleep.

For the dreams that would surely come.

I would chase her again.

And this time—I would catch her.

Because in this reality, I already had.

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I was drowning in heat and fur and pleasure.

The dream had started slow, teasing, lulling me into its grip like warm honey pooling in the sun. Now I floated in it, my senses heightened to every touch, every brush of his fur against my skin, every rumbling purr that vibrated from his massive chest into mine.

This wasn't my first dream of Zehn, but it was the most vivid. The most real. I could smell him—that intoxicating mix of wild spice and something earthy that made my blood sing. My fingers twitched with the need to touch, to explore.

So I did.

He let me.

I ran my hands over the tawny suede of his belly, marveling at the texture—soft yet firm, the ridges of his abdominal muscles shifting under my touch. His chest was massive, a broad, muscled plane dusted with fine golden fur that felt like silk against my fingertips.

“This ...” I whispered, trailing my hands lower, feeling every defined ripple. “This is very unfair.”

He rumbled—a sound that was pure male amusement, vibrating through his ribs. “What is unfair, kitten?”

I flattened my palms against his stomach, reveling in the sheer size of him. “That you

get to be this hot.”

The laugh that rumbled from him was wicked, his fangs glinting as he grinned up at me. His eyes—liquid gold with vertical pupils—tracked my every movement with predatory focus, though he remained still beneath my exploring hands.

I had never been petite—at 5’7”, I’d always been tall and strong, solid enough that no one had ever called me delicate.

But compared to him?

I was tiny.

Even in this so-called “base form,” he was still a beast of a man, his golden-striped body sprawled beneath me, nearly seven feet of muscle and sin and purring arrogance.

“The larger form you saw before is my battle form,” he murmured, his massive hands spanning my hips, thumbs brushing the dip of my waist. “This is my true form.”

I smirked, dragging my nails lightly over his chest, watching his abdominal muscles tense in response.

“This is still really big.”

His tail wrapped around my waist, tight and possessive, pulling me flush against him as he arched his hips upward, grinding his cock against me in a way that made my breath catch.

I swallowed hard.

Yup.

Definitely really big.

I shifted, straddling him, the thick, silken heat of him nudging at my entrance, teasing, tempting. I was already slick, ready, my body knowing what it wanted even as my mind still struggled to process the reality of him.

His golden eyes burned, watching me, letting me take control.

So I did.

I sank down slowly, feeling him stretch me inch by achingly perfect inch, the fullness stealing my breath. My thighs trembled with the effort of restraint, of wanting to take all of him at once but knowing I needed time.

His grip tightened on my hips, his claws pricking the skin just enough to remind me who was really in control here.

He groaned, low and guttural, his muscles tensing beneath me as he filled me completely.

“Stars, kitten,” he growled, his voice ragged. “You feel...”

He hissed, his tail tightening. “So good.”

I rolled my hips, and he snarled, his fingers digging into my skin.

His control was cracking.

And it was intoxicating.

I braced my hands on his chest, lifting, lowering, setting a pace that had us both shaking. The drag of him inside me sent sparks shooting up my spine, pleasure coiling tight in my core.

His breath turned ragged, his grip hard, his cock pulsing inside me, his tail flexing around my waist as if trying to hold me still. But I wouldn't be controlled—not in this dream, not in this moment. I wanted to watch him come apart beneath me.

I grinned down at him, delirious with power.

“I thought you were supposed to be the big bad?” I teased, tightening around him, squeezing deliberately.

His eyes went wild.

And then?—

He bit me.

Sharp teeth sank into my shoulder, not painful, but possessive, his growl rolling through me as pleasure detonated behind my eyes.

I came instantly, gasping, trembling, the shock of it making me arch hard against him. The waves of ecstasy crashed through me, my body clenching around his length as I cried out his name.

He followed with a roar, his body locking beneath me, his hands tight on my hips as he spilled inside me. I could feel each pulse, each throb, each hot spurt as he filled me.

I collapsed against his chest, panting.

His arms came around me, holding me close, his purring deep and satisfied. One large hand stroked up and down my spine, soothing, claiming. His tail remained wrapped around me, as if even in satisfaction he couldn't bear to let me go.

The warmth coiled around us, and I sighed, utterly wrecked, utterly content.

Until I woke up.

I was mid-swoon when reality slammed into me.

My eyes flew open to darkness, but the heat—the heat was real.

Scorching. Overwhelming. Heat pooled low and urgent, my hips grinding instinctively against something big, hard, and very real.

I froze, my brain frantically reconnecting to my body, trying to make sense of where the dream ended and reality began.

A heartbeat passed.

And then I realized?—

Oh my god.

I was grinding against Zehn.

In real life.

On top of him.

My legs tangled with his, my body pressed against his, the imprint of his dream-touch

still burning under my skin.

His chest was just as broad as it had been in my dream, his fur just as soft against my bare skin.

The reality of it crashed over me—I was sprawled on top of a massive alien warrior, my body still throbbing with need for him.

I yelped, scrambling back—except his arms were already wrapped around me, holding me securely. One large palm splayed across my lower back, keeping me pressed against him.

He rumbled, his voice thick with sleep and amusement.

“Easy, kitten,” he purred, pulling me closer, not letting me flee. “You are safe.”

I trembled, still aching, still needy, still reeling from the dream that had felt so vivid, so real. The evidence of my arousal was embarrassingly obvious, my body slick and ready against his.

He felt it.

He knew.

And he helped.

He soothed me, rocked against me, his warmth deliberate, controlled, devastating. His hand slid between us, finding the place where I needed him most. His touch was expert, precise—not fumbling or hesitant. As if he knew exactly how I liked to be touched.

Because he did.

Because of the dream we had shared.

I shattered all over again, his purr chasing me through the aftershocks. My face buried against his neck, my teeth sinking into his shoulder to muffle my cries as pleasure overwhelmed me.

I slumped against him, shaky, breathless, boneless.

I tried for words. Failed spectacularly.

“...How,” I finally rasped, “did we just share the same dream?”

His large hand cupped my shoulder, rubbing the exact place he had bitten me in the dream.

The skin was smooth, unbroken?—

But I still felt it.

I swallowed hard, pushing up enough to see his face in the dim light. His features were the same as they had been in my dream—the sharp feline angles, the golden eyes that seemed to glow in the darkness, the hint of fangs when he smiled.

Zehn’s golden eyes burned, something fierce and claiming in his gaze.

“Because you are mine,” he said simply. “The universe has gifted you to me. To cherish. To protect. To love.”

I stared at him.

My brain refused to compute.

That was not how reality worked.

I was a number cruncher.

I dealt with facts, data, probabilities.

Not soulmate magic sex dreams.

And yet?—

He was so sure. So certain. His conviction radiated from him like heat from a sun. There was no doubt in his eyes, no hesitation in his touch.

I wasn't sure of anything—except for the way he looked at me.

As if I was the most precious thing in the entire galaxy.

As if he would tear apart stars with his bare hands if they threatened me.

I opened my mouth to argue, to demand a more scientific explanation, to insist that shared dreams were a neurological impossibility.

He pulled me close and kissed me instead.

It was slow, careful, his tongue tentatively brushing against my lips, waiting.

I opened for him.

Because hot damn, he felt good.

Because his taste—wild spice and something primal—made everything else seem inconsequential.

He rumbled in approval, deepening the kiss, his hand cupping my jaw, his thumb stroking my cheek.

And every nerve ending lit up.

I moaned, throwing my arms around him, sinking into the heat and hunger and need. My logical brain surrendered to the reality my body already accepted—whatever this was, it felt right.

Then—

He stiffened.

The air shifted.

His ears flicked, his nose twitching.

His entire body went rigid beneath me, transforming from my passionate lover to a predator in an instant.

Danger.

I had seen enough thriller movies to know not to make a sound when the big bad was lurking nearby.

Except—

I looked at Zehn.

At the way his body flexed, at the way he shifted into something bigger, sharper, deadlier. His muscles bulged, fur bristling, claws extending from his fingertips. His eyes narrowed to predatory slits, scanning the darkness around us.

And I realized?—

It was a good thing I had my own big bad.

Whatever lurked out there in the darkness, Zehn was more terrifying.

His nose skimmed my cheek, his tongue flicking out to taste my skin. A silent promise—I will come back for you.

Then—

He slapped a kiss to my forehead and melted into the night.

Not a sound. Not even the rustling of fabric. One moment he was there, solid and real beneath me, and the next gone—leaving only the lingering warmth of his body and the scent of wild spice on my skin.

I held my breath, waiting, listening, every nerve ending suddenly attuned to the darkness around me.

And I hoped—with every cell in my body—that whatever had caught Zehn's attention would never know what hit it.

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I came back to consciousness drowning. At least, that's what my body believed—lungs burning, muscles spasming against the thick, viscous liquid that filled the containment chamber.

My claws scraped against the transparent walls, leaving faint scratches in their wake as my mind struggled to separate reality from the dream that had awakened me.

Their dream. The dream of union that wasn't meant for me to witness, yet had pulled me from my artificial slumber like a hook through water.

The respirator mask clung to my face, forcing oxygen-rich fluid into my lungs with mechanical precision.

My body remembered its function even as my mind rebelled against it.

How long had I been suspended? Months? Years?

The chronometers on my containment unit had long since failed, their displays cracked and dark.

I blinked, pushing against the haze of sedatives still coursing through my system.

The laboratory around me was bathed in the dim blue glow of emergency lighting—the main power had failed, leaving only the essential systems running on backup generators.

Dust coated the abandoned consoles. Silence pressed against the walls like a physical

force.

But I wasn't truly awake because of system failures or power fluctuations.

It was the dream.

I had seen them. Felt them. Their passion had burned through the chemical cocktail designed to keep me docile, scorching away the artificial sleep like morning sun on fog.

The memory of it lingered, sharp and vivid—their bodies entwined, her soft curves against his powerful frame, the sounds they made as they claimed each other.

And I had only been able to watch.

A voyeur to their unity. An intruder in a sacred moment.

The pain of it twisted in my chest, sharp and unfamiliar. I had no right to such feelings. Creatures like me weren't designed for emotional attachments. We were weapons, nothing more.

My containment unit gave a low, warning beep as my vitals spiked.

The suspension fluid began to drain, a programmed response to my increased heart rate and neural activity.

The liquid level dropped past my shoulders, my chest, my waist. As the fluid receded, gravity reclaimed me, my muscles protesting as they took on my full weight for the first time in. ..however long I'd been here.

The respirator detached with a wet, sucking sound, leaving me gasping as my lungs

expelled the oxygenated fluid.

I coughed violently, the liquid splattering against the bottom of the chamber, my throat raw with the effort.

Each breath burned as air replaced fluid.

My claws dug into the soft material beneath me as I fought for control.

When the last of the suspension fluid had drained, the containment door slid open with a soft hiss. I stumbled out, my legs unsteady, my tail lashing for balance as I collapsed onto the cold metal floor. The chill against my bare skin was shocking after the regulated temperature of the suspension.

The scars that mapped my body caught the blue emergency lights, silvery against my darker fur.

Unlike Zehn's golden pelt, mine was charcoal gray, striped with black—one of many modifications made to the original Rodinian template.

My claws were longer, sharper. My muscle density greater. My senses more acute.

A perfect hunter. A flawless killer.

Subject Khaaz. Asset K-7. The culmination of genetic manipulation spanning twelve species.

I pushed myself upright, shaking off the lingering weakness.

The room swam before me, my vision adjusting to the dim light.

The laboratory was vast, filled with equipment I recognized all too well—genetic sequencers, molecular assemblers, neural mapping arrays.

The tools that had created me. Had shaped me from disparate genetic fragments into something new. Something dangerous.

My earliest memories were of pain. Of being dissected and reassembled. Of scientists in sterile suits observing from behind protective barriers as they tested my reflexes, my strength, my killing efficiency. They spoke of me as a breakthrough, a triumph of bioengineering. Never as a living being.

I had been their perfect weapon, right up until I wasn't.

Until they realized I could think for myself.

I stumbled toward the nearest terminal, leaving wet footprints across the dusty floor.

The console activated at my touch, though the display flickered weakly, starved for power.

I navigated through the system with practiced ease, searching for data on how much time had passed since the facility had been abandoned.

The timestamp on the last system entry made my blood run cold.

Fifteen years.

I had been suspended, forgotten, for fifteen years.

The facility evacuation log showed a hasty departure—not planned, but forced. Something had gone wrong. The details were fragmented, corrupted by time and

system degradation. But the outcome was clear: the scientists had fled, leaving their work—leaving me—behind.

But not completely abandoned. The automated security systems still ran on minimal power. The defensive protocols remained active. And my containment unit had maintained its function until...until the dream had broken through.

The dream that wasn't mine.

I closed my eyes, the images flooding back with painful clarity.

Zehn and the human female—Everly. Her name had echoed in their shared consciousness.

I had felt Zehn's possessive claim, had experienced the echo of his pleasure as he'd taken her.

And I had felt her surrender, her acceptance, her joy.

It was beautiful. Terrifying. Overwhelming.

And I had no place in it.

I was an abomination. A thing cobbled together from genetic scraps. The Rodinian DNA that formed my base template gave me the form, the instincts, but not the soul. Not the right.

Yet I had been there, witnessing their unity. And that meant something had changed. Something fundamental in my genetic makeup had shifted during my long suspension.

I moved through the laboratory, gathering supplies. Clothing first—a simple utility jumpsuit that hung from a hook near the decontamination chamber. Then weapons—a plasma knife from a forgotten workstation, a disruptor pistol from an emergency security locker with a broken lock.

My tail flicked with agitation as I worked. The dream still burned in my mind, impossible to dismiss. Why had I been included? Why now, after all this time?

The answer came as I passed a blank wall that slid open at my approach. Hidden, even in this hidden place. A secondary lab, smaller than the main facility. More specialized.

More terrible.

The scent hit me first—sharp and metallic beneath the dust. Old blood. My blood, spilled during countless procedures. The walls were lined with display screens, most dark now, but a few still weakly glowing. They showed genetic maps, splicing projections, neural pathway analyses.

And at the center of the room: a second containment unit. Empty, but prepped. Waiting.

Not for me.

For her.

The data still displayed on the active screens told the story. The scientists had been creating me for a purpose beyond mere destruction. They had engineered me to be a lure. A genetic beacon for Rodinian fate-mates.

I was designed to find her. To bring her back to this place. To use the sacred mating

bond of the Rodinians as a weapon.

Because a human with compatible genetic markers—compatible with me—would be the perfect vessel for the next phase of their experiments. A breeding program. A new generation of weapons, born rather than built.

My stomach twisted with revulsion. The dream made sense now. It had never been meant for me to share, but my spliced Rodinian DNA had connected me to their unity as an observer. A witness. A warning.

I knew what I had to do.

I had to find her before anyone else realized what was happening.

Before anyone tracking the old frequencies detected the unity broadcast and came to investigate.

The scientists who had created me might be gone, but there would be others—governments, cartels, private military contractors—who would kill to acquire their research. To acquire me.

And to acquire her.

I gathered the remaining supplies quickly now, purpose driving my movements.

Food packs. Water purification tablets. A med-kit with regenerative patches.

I found a tattered scientific journal, its pages filled with handwritten notes about genetic stability in cross-species bonding.

I stuffed it into my pack. Knowledge was power, and I needed every advantage.

As I worked, I tried not to think about what it would mean to see them together. To stand before Zehn—a pure Rodinian Reaper—and the woman who was his by cosmic right. Would he see me for what I was? A twisted reflection, a corruption of his proud lineage?

Would she look at me with fear? With disgust?

It shouldn't matter. It couldn't matter. Their safety—her safety—was more important than my own confused feelings.

I checked the facility's external sensors, scanning for signs of activity beyond the reinforced walls. The jungle surrounding the black site teemed with life, but nothing humanoid. Nothing sentient. Not yet.

But the site had begun broadcasting the moment I awoke. A low-level ping, designed to alert the original operators that their asset had become active. It was only a matter of time before someone intercepted it. Before they came.

I had to reach Everly first. Had to warn them both.

Before leaving, I accessed the main terminal one last time, initiating a cascading system failure.

Lights flickered as power diverted to the self-destruct sequence.

It wasn't enough to destroy the facility completely—the designers had been too thorough for that—but it would buy time. Would bury the worst of the evidence.

The terminal counted down. Twenty minutes until detonation.

I shouldered my makeshift pack and headed for the emergency exit tunnel. The door

protested, grinding against years of disuse, but yielded to my enhanced strength. Beyond lay darkness—a long, narrow passage that would lead me to the surface, away from the immediate blast radius.

As I stepped into the tunnel, I allowed myself one final thought about the dream. About the connection I had felt, however uninvited, to both of them. About the way their passion had called to something buried deep within my engineered soul.

I wanted that. Wanted to be part of it.

But what I wanted didn't matter. Only her safety mattered now. Only protecting them both from what would come hunting.

I moved silently through the darkness, my enhanced vision cutting through the gloom. The air grew fresher as I approached the exit, carrying scents of the jungle beyond—rich soil, exotic flora, the musk of creatures I would soon hunt for sustenance.

And somewhere, carried on that same breeze, her scent. Faint but unmistakable. The human female who had been chosen by fate to bond with a Rodinian warrior—and who had, unknowingly, awakened a forgotten weapon designed to find her.

I would reach her before the others came. I would warn them of the danger. I would protect her, even from myself if necessary.

The tunnel ended at a concealed hatch, overgrown with vegetation. I pushed through, emerging into violet twilight. The jungle stretched before me, vast and wild. Behind me, buried in the earth, the countdown continued. Soon, the evidence of my creation would be rubble and ash.

But not all of it. Never all of it. Because I still existed.

I lifted my head, testing the air, searching for her scent trail. It was there—subtle but distinct. Leading north, away from the facility.

Away from the past that had created me.

Toward a future I couldn't predict but was determined to safeguard.

I moved into the jungle, my body adapting to its freedom, my senses sharpening with each step. The hunter awakened fully now, instincts honed by both nature and deliberate design guiding my path.

I would find her.

I would protect her.

Even if it meant watching from the shadows while she found happiness with another.

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The jungle held secrets. I felt them stir against my senses as I moved silently between the violet-tinged trees, my claws barely disturbing the undergrowth. My fur bristled along my spine, instincts sharpening as I tracked the disturbance through the alien forest.

I paused, ears flicking forward to catch the subtle sounds of night predators retreating from my path.

My tail lashed behind me, betraying the tension I worked to contain.

I had left Everly behind the protective barrier I'd established.

Safe, for now. But safety on this world was an illusion that could shatter in an instant.

The unity dream still lingered in my blood—her body beneath mine, her scent filling my lungs, her voice calling my name as pleasure claimed us both.

But there had been something else. A witness.

An observer. Not just the jungle's dangers bleeding into my consciousness as I'd initially believed, but something more deliberate. More aware.

I had felt eyes on us, watching from shadows that shouldn't exist in the private sanctuary of a unity dream.

Impossible.

Unity dreams were sacred, shared only between fated mates—a connection so rare and precious no one could intrude on that bond. No one should have been able to.

Yet something had.

I inhaled deeply, sorting through the complex tapestry of scents that filled the alien jungle. Decaying vegetation. The musk of nocturnal creatures. The lingering trace of my own passage. And something else—something that didn't belong. Something engineered.

My muscles tensed as a new sound registered—a faint, rhythmic hum that vibrated just at the edge of hearing. Not natural. Not biological. Mechanical.

I melted into the shadows of a massive fern, my Reaper suit camouflaging me to my surroundings. The sound grew closer, more defined. Not one source, but two, moving in a coordinated pattern that spoke of programmed efficiency rather than organic curiosity.

They appeared above the treeline—sentinel drones, their sleek hulls absorbing rather than reflecting light, designed for stealth reconnaissance. Military grade. Their movements were precise, methodical, scanning patterns that covered maximum terrain with minimum energy expenditure.

I recognized the design—similar to Legion recon units, but with subtle differences that marked them as non-standard. Black market. Retrofitted with sensors that could penetrate natural cover, detect heat signatures, analyze atmospheric composition for traces of exhaled breath.

Hunting drones.

But hunting what? Or whom?

My hand moved to the blade at my hip, weighing options as the drones swept closer to my position. If I engaged, I would reveal my location. If I ignore them, perhaps they will stumble upon my camp with Everly.

The decision crystallized in my mind. I would need to eliminate them, quickly and quietly, before they could transmit her location to whoever controlled them. I tensed, preparing to launch upward, calculating the precise angle needed to disable both drones before either could send an alert.

But I never got the chance.

The first drone dropped so suddenly that for a moment, I thought my eyes had failed me. One second it was hovering, sensors sweeping—the next, plummeting silently through the canopy, its systems dark.

The second followed an instant later, its descent controlled rather than catastrophic, guided down through the branches by...something. Something fast. Something that moved with such fluid precision that even my enhanced vision struggled to track it.

I remained motionless, my breathing shallow, controlled. Whatever had disabled the drones was more dangerous than the machines themselves. More skilled. More lethal.

A shadow detached itself from the upper canopy, descending in a controlled drop that spoke of muscle control beyond standard Rodinian capabilities. It landed without sound, a dark silhouette against the bioluminescent undergrowth.

For a heartbeat, I thought my eyes were playing tricks. The figure before me was Rodinian in form—the height, the build, the characteristic tail—but wrong. Different in ways that sent alarm racing through my blood.

His fur was charcoal gray where mine was golden, the black stripes more

pronounced, more jagged.

His frame was leaner, his muscles corded rather than bulky, designed for speed over raw power.

But it was his eyes that truly marked him as other—iridescent rather than gold, with vertical pupils that seemed to glow in the darkness.

And the scent...

Beneath the musk of Rodinian male lay chemical traces that didn't belong—synthetic compounds, gene stabilizers, markers of laboratory manipulation. And beneath that, impossibly, unmistakably...

Everly.

Her scent clung to him, not as if he had touched her, but as if it were part of his very composition. As if her genetic code had somehow been woven into his own.

The wrongness of it hit me like a physical blow, triggering an instinctive response I couldn't control.

My transformation ripped through me, bones cracking, muscles expanding as my battle form emerged.

I grew two feet taller, my already substantial frame swelling with combat-enhanced muscle, claws extending to their full deadly length.

I roared—a challenge, a warning, a promise of violence.

His response wasn't what I expected.

He didn't transform. Didn't posture. Didn't return my challenge. Instead, he simply...moved.

One moment he stood examining the downed drone, the next he was nowhere to be seen. My enhanced senses tracked a blur of movement to my left, then behind me, then above—too fast, impossibly fast. I slashed at empty air, my claws finding nothing but jungle mist.

“I'm not here to fight you, Reaper.”

The voice came from everywhere and nowhere, resonant yet soft, carrying easily despite its low volume. I pivoted, seeking its source, finding only shadows.

“Show yourself,” I snarled, my voice deeper, rougher in my battle form. “Face me, interloper.”

A soft sound whispered through the foliage.

“If I wanted you dead, Zehn Varrek Tol'Vekkar, you would be.” The shadows shifted, and he was there, perched on a branch twenty feet above me, examining me with those unnervingly bright eyes. “Your mate would be alone. Unprotected. Is that what you want?”

I launched upward, covering the distance in a single powerful leap, claws extended to rip, to tear, to destroy this abomination that dared speak of Everly. But he was gone before I reached his position, leaving nothing but disturbed leaves in his wake.

I landed on the branch, wood cracking beneath my weight, my senses straining to locate him. “How do you know her name?” I demanded, fury making my voice shake. “How do you bear her scent?”

“The same way you knew mine,” came the reply, this time from ground level. “Though you haven’t spoken it yet.”

I froze, the implication of his words sinking in. He was right. I hadn’t asked his name, yet somewhere in the recesses of my mind, I knew it. As if it had been whispered to me in a dream.

Khaaz.

The name surfaced unbidden, as familiar as if I’d known it all my life.

“Impossible,” I growled, but even as I denied it, certainty settled in my bones. This was the presence I had felt in our unity dream. Somehow, impossibly, he had been there. Had witnessed what no outsider should ever see.

I dropped from the branch, landing heavily, my battle form still fully engaged. Khaaz stood before me now, making no attempt to flee, though his posture remained alert, ready to move at the slightest provocation.

“How?” I demanded, advancing on him. “Unity dreams are shared only between fate mates.”

“I didn’t choose to,” he said quietly, his eyes never leaving mine. “I was made to.”

The simple statement contained volumes of meaning that I couldn’t yet grasp, but the truth of it rang in my blood. He wasn’t lying. Whatever he was—this modified, engineered version of my species—he believed what he was saying.

“Explain,” I ordered, still not relaxing my combat stance.

“I was created,” he said, gesturing to his form with a clawed hand.

“Engineered from Rodinian genetic material, spliced with other species for enhanced capabilities. Designed for a specific purpose.” His eyes met mine, and for the first time, I saw emotion there—a flash of something like shame. “To find her.”

My fury returned, hot and immediate. “If you think I’ll let you touch her?—”

“Not for me,” he interrupted, his voice hardening. “For them. The scientists. The ones who made me.”

He turned, indicating the drones he’d disabled.

“They’re coming back. The facility where I was created was abandoned five years ago, but the systems were left running.

Monitoring. Waiting. When your unity dream happened.

..” He paused, searching for words. “I was connected to it. Through genetic markers they built into me. Markers designed to resonate with compatible humans.”

“With Everly,” I said, the pieces beginning to fit together in my mind.

He nodded. “With Everly. They wanted Rodinian hybrids. Wanted to understand our mating bonds. To weaponize them.” His tail flicked in agitation. “I was their prototype. Their first attempt.”

I studied him more carefully now, seeing beyond the immediate threat to the evidence of what had been done to him.

The scars that mapped his body weren’t battle wounds—they were surgical.

Experimental. The modifications to his frame weren’t natural adaptations, but

deliberate alterations designed to enhance lethality.

“You’re a weapon,” I said, understanding dawning.

“I was meant to be.” He moved toward one of the drones, crouching beside it. “But they miscalculated. Gave me too much Rodinian genetic material. Enough to develop...independence. Enough to recognize Everly as something more than a target.”

I felt my battle form begin to recede, my heightened aggression fading as comprehension replaced fury. “You shared our unity.”

It wasn’t a question, but he answered anyway. “Not a conscious act, I assure you.” His claws flexed, betraying emotion his face wouldn’t show. “But it woke me from suspension. Made me...aware. In ways I hadn’t been before.”

The implications were staggering. Unity dreams were the most intimate connection possible between mates. For Khaaz to have experienced ours, even as an observer...

“You’re connected to her,” I said slowly, the realization settling like a stone in my gut. “To us.”

He met my gaze steadily. “Not by choice. Not by fate. By design.” He gestured to the drones again. “And now they’re searching. The facility’s automated systems detected our unity, detected my awakening. These are just the first wave of reconnaissance. There will be more.”

I absorbed this, thinking through the implications. “Who are ‘they’? The scientists who created you?”

“Perhaps. Or others who’ve acquired their research. Private military contractors.

Governments. Anyone who would benefit from an army of enhanced hybrids.” His expression darkened. “Anyone who would want Everly for breeding stock.”

The crude term sent a shock of rage through me, my claws extending involuntarily. “I’ll kill anyone who touches her.”

“As would I,” Khaaz said simply. “Which is why I’m here. Not to harm her. Not to take her from you. To protect her.” He straightened, his posture shifting subtly, becoming less defensive. “To warn you both. This planet isn’t safe. Not for her. Not now.”

I circled him slowly, still wary, still uncertain. Everything in my training, in my instincts, told me to eliminate the threat he represented. But something deeper—something that resonated with the same frequency as my bond with Everly—recognized him as...not enemy.

“Why should I trust you?” I asked, though the question felt hollow even as I spoke it.

“Because you already do,” he replied. “Because you know my name without being told. Because your mate called to both of us, though she doesn’t yet understand how.

” He gestured to the jungle around us. “And because these drones were searching for her signature, not mine. I was able to disable them before they found her location, but the next wave won’t be so easily fooled. ”

I knew he was right. Knew it with the same certainty that had guided me to Everly after my crash. The universe had woven our fates together, all three of us, in ways I couldn’t yet comprehend but couldn’t deny.

“How long do we have?” I asked, making my decision.

“Hours, not days,” Khaaz replied. “I initiated a self-destruct sequence at the facility before I left, but it won’t destroy everything. Just buy us time.”

I nodded, already calculating. “There’s an outpost that pinged to the north. Might have communication equipment, transport.”

“Too far,” Khaaz shook his head. “There’s another facility. A black site. It could have an emergency shuttle. At least a comms array sophisticated enough to contact your Legion command.”

I considered this, weighing the risks. “Leading Everly directly to the place they’d want to take her?”

“Only a matter of time they’d find her,” Khaaz said grimly. “Better to extract her from the planet entirely than try to hide in the jungle.”

He was right, though I hated to admit it. I’d been a Reaper long enough to recognize when a tactical retreat was the only viable option.

“We need to move now,” I said, turning back toward where I’d left Everly. “She’s not safe alone.”

Khaaz nodded, falling into step beside me, his movements eerily silent compared to my own. We traveled without speaking for several minutes, the implicit truce between us fragile but holding.

Finally, I broke the silence. “What happens after? If we get off-world?”

He didn’t pretend to misunderstand. “I don’t know. This connection between us—it wasn’t meant to exist. There’s no precedent.”

“She’s my mate,” I said, the possessive growl impossible to suppress.

“Yes,” he agreed without hesitation. “She is. I make no claim on her.”

But I heard what he didn’t say—that the connection existed regardless. That somehow, through the twisted manipulations of science and fate, the three of us were bound together in ways none of us had chosen.

“One problem at a time,” I muttered, more to myself than to him. “First, we get her to safety.”

On this, at least, we were in perfect agreement.

As we neared the clearing where I’d left Everly, I caught her scent on the breeze—sweet, warm, alive. My pace quickened involuntarily, the primal need to confirm her safety overriding all else.

Khaaz matched my stride, his own nostrils flaring as he caught the same scent. I saw the same protective instinct flash in his eyes, and for the first time, I felt something beyond suspicion toward him.

Recognition.

Understanding.

We would protect her. Together if necessary.

The how and why of what came after could wait.

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I couldn't sleep. My body craved rest, but my mind refused to shut down, cycling between the gnawing anxiety of our situation and the fear of what would happen if I actually closed my eyes.

Every time I drifted toward unconsciousness, I'd jerk awake, afraid to slip into another one of those dreams—the ones where I was tangled up with Zehn, my not-supposed-to-be-sexy alien murder cat, his powerful body moving against mine in ways that left me gasping even after I woke.

The shelter he'd constructed kept out the elements, but it couldn't protect me from my own treacherous mind.

I paced the small clearing, trying to exhaust myself into dreamless sleep, when something in the wind made me freeze.

Two days ago, I'd been on vacation, trying to recover from burnout at my high-stress job. Now I was hiding in an alien jungle with a seven-foot-tall leopard man who claimed I was his "fate mate." The universe had a sick sense of humor.

I ran my fingers through my long black hair, grimacing at the tangles.

My body felt heavy with fatigue, but the tension in the air was palpable—an electric current that made my skin prickle.

Zehn had left hours ago to scout the perimeter, and the silence of his absence was oppressive.

I'd grown accustomed to his presence, his low rumbling voice, even the way his eyes tracked my every movement.

I hated that I'd begun to find comfort in it.

"This is insane," I muttered, continuing my pacing. "You're losing it, Everly."

The thin fabric of my clothing clung to my skin in the humid night air.

Each step I took across the clearing was measured, careful not to disturb anything that might give away our position.

Zehn had been adamant about staying hidden.

From what, I wasn't entirely sure—he'd been frustratingly vague about the specifics, saying only that there were "others" looking for us.

I stopped mid-stride. There was something different about the night sounds—or rather, the lack of them.

The constant chorus of alien insects and creatures had suddenly gone quiet.

Something in my gut—some primal instinct I didn't know I possessed—told me to remain perfectly still. I didn't even breathe.

That's when I heard it—a faint mechanical whirring overhead, barely audible but distinctly artificial among the organic sounds of the jungle. My eyes darted upward, scanning the small patches of night sky visible through the dense canopy.

They came into view suddenly—sleek, metallic objects gliding through the air with an eerie precision.

Drones. At least half a dozen of them, their surfaces gleaming under the blue light of this planet's larger moon.

They moved in formation, scanning patterns sweeping methodically across the landscape.

I remembered Zehn's instructions if anything like this happened: Don't move. Don't run. The shields will protect you.

The shields. Zehn had activated some kind of protective barrier around our temporary camp before he left.

He'd pressed something on his gauntlet, and the air had shimmered briefly before returning to normal.

"They won't see you through this," he'd said, his amber eyes serious.

"But if they do, run to the eastern ridge and hide in the black rock formations."

I stood rigid as the drones hovered closer, their scanning beams cutting through the night in eerie blue lines.

One drone descended lower than the others, hovering just above the canopy directly over my position.

For a moment, I thought the shield was working—the drone's scanning beam passed over the area without pausing.

Then something changed. The drone halted its sweeping pattern and focused its beam directly on the spot where I stood. The blue light intensified, becoming almost painful to look at. I squinted against the glare, my heart hammering against my ribs.

The drone was descending, the beam narrowing, penetrating the shield that was supposed to keep me hidden.

Whatever technology Zehn had deployed, these things had found a way through it.

I took a step back, my survival instinct screaming at me to run, but my body refusing to obey.

I was trapped in the light, exposed, vulnerable.

The drone was close enough now that I could see its complex design—multiple lenses, sensor arrays, and what looked disturbingly like weapons systems. It emitted a high-pitched whine that made my teeth ache, and I knew instinctively that it was about to do something. Something bad.

A massive shadow suddenly cut through the blue light.

There was a sound like metal being torn apart, and the drone spun wildly before crashing to the ground, sparks flying from its ruined hull.

I gasped, stumbling backward as a massive figure landed where the drone had been, his powerful legs absorbing the impact with terrifying grace.

Zehn. His eyes glowed in the darkness, fierce and predatory. He wore no camouflage technology now—his true form fully visible. Seven feet of muscled, lethal alien, his leopard-like features contorted in a snarl as he surveyed the sky for the remaining drones.

They converged on our position, their scanning beams intensifying, but before they could get close, they suddenly faltered. One by one, they dropped from the sky like stones, crashing into the undergrowth with metallic thuds and electrical sizzles.

“What the—” I began, but the words died in my throat as another figure emerged from the shadows at the edge of the clearing.

He was similar to Zehn—another leopard-man alien of the same imposing height—but different in ways that made my breath catch.

Where Zehn’s fur pattern was sleek and uniform, this newcomer’s was disrupted by scars that cut pale lines through the dark spots.

His eyes were more luminous, like crystal shards.

And there was something about the way he moved—more cautious, more measured—that made him seem both more dangerous and more vulnerable than Zehn.

Most disturbing of all was the sense of recognition that washed over me. I had never seen this alien before, yet something in me knew him. As our eyes met across the clearing, a name rose unbidden to my lips.

“Khaaz,” I whispered, then immediately clamped my hand over my mouth. How did I know his name?

The scarred alien froze, his luminous eyes widening slightly. He glanced at Zehn, who gave an almost imperceptible nod.

“Everly,” Zehn said, approaching me with quick, fluid strides. His voice was lower than usual, a rumble that seemed to vibrate through me. “Are you harmed?”

I shook my head, still staring at the newcomer. “How do I know his name? I’ve never seen him before.”

Zehn's jaw tightened. "You have. In your dreams." He said it matter-of-factly, as if this was a perfectly reasonable explanation.

"What? No. No, the dreams were with—" I stopped, heat flooding my face. I wasn't about to discuss my erotic dreams with Zehn while standing in front of this stranger.

"The dreams of unity are not always clear," Zehn said, misunderstanding my embarrassment. "But they are never wrong. Your soul recognizes him, just as it recognizes me."

Khaaz remained at the edge of the clearing, his posture alert but hesitant. He seemed almost afraid to approach me, which was absurd considering he was essentially a seven-foot-tall killing machine. When he finally spoke, his voice was rougher than Zehn's, as if it wasn't used as often.

"I didn't expect them to act so quickly," he said, addressing Zehn more than me. "They've never used this level of resources for a retrieval before. At least, not to my knowledge."

I looked between them, frustration building. "Would someone please explain what's going on? Who is he?" I gestured at Khaaz. "Why do I know his name? And who are 'they'?"

Zehn moved closer to me, his large body radiating heat in the cool night air. "Khaaz is like me. Rodinian. But also..." he hesitated, "different. Altered."

"I'm a failed experiment," Khaaz said bluntly. "This planet hides a black site operation of creating biological weapons. I was one of the few who survived the process."

"And now he's going to help us get out of here," Zehn added, not giving me time to

process this information.

“Help us how?” I asked.

“I know the location of a hidden facility,” Khaaz said. “With transport capabilities that can get you off-world.”

The tension between the two males was palpable. They weren’t hostile toward each other, exactly, but there was a wariness, an unspoken competition that made the air feel thick and heavy. I had the distinct impression they were communicating something beyond their words.

“Wait,” I said, holding up my hands. “Does this mean we need to leave now? Or should we stay here?”

Khaaz’s eyes swept the clearing, taking in the downed drones.

“The shields are compromised. They’ve calibrated their scanners to detect the energy signature.

” He looked up at the night sky. “But they won’t send another wave immediately.

They’ll assume the drones malfunctioned and wait for confirmation before deploying more resources. ”

“So we have time,” I said.

“Some,” Zehn agreed. “But not much.”

“At this point,” Khaaz said, “we might as well rest and move toward the facility in the morning. Traveling at night in this terrain would be difficult, even for us.” He

glanced at me, clearly indicating that I was the limiting factor in their travel speed.

I bristled at the implication. "I can keep up."

A ghost of a smile touched Khaaz's scarred face.

"I'm sure you can, but there's no need to push ourselves when we have a strategic advantage in waiting.

Dawn will give us better visibility; the engineers use different surveillance patterns at first light.

There will be a brief window when their coverage is minimal. "

Zehn didn't seem entirely convinced. He prowled the edge of the clearing, his powerful muscles rippling beneath his fur. "And if they send ground units instead of drones?"

"Then we'll hear them coming from miles away," Khaaz replied. "The local wildlife is sensitive to their presence. They'll give us plenty of warning."

The two aliens stared at each other, another silent communication passing between them. Finally, Zehn gave a curt nod.

"Fine. We rest, then move at first light." He turned to me. "You should try to sleep, Everly. Tomorrow will be demanding."

"That's what I was trying to do before all this happened," I said, gesturing at the destroyed drones.

Khaaz watched me with those too-bright eyes, his expression unreadable. There was

something in the way he looked at me—like he was afraid of me, or afraid for me. It made no sense. I was the vulnerable human here, surrounded by alien predators and hidden threats.

“I’ll take first watch,” Khaaz announced abruptly, breaking the tense silence. Without waiting for a response, he turned and melted into the jungle shadows with disturbing ease.

Zehn watched him go, then turned to me. “He won’t let anything happen to you.”

“Why?” I asked. “Why does he care? Why do either of you care? I’m just some random human who happened to have weird dreams.”

Zehn’s expression softened slightly, which on his fierce features looked almost comical. “Not random, Everly. Never random. The universe doesn’t make mistakes when it comes to fate mates.”

“There’s that term again. ‘Fate mates.’ You keep saying it like it should mean something to me.”

“It will,” he said simply. “When you’re ready to understand.”

I sighed, suddenly bone-tired. The adrenaline of the drone attack was wearing off, leaving me drained. “I don’t know if I’ll ever be ready to understand any of this.”

Zehn gestured to the shelter he’d constructed earlier. “Rest. I’ll join you soon.”

I wanted to argue, to demand more answers, but exhaustion was winning.

I retreated to the shelter, wrapping myself in the strange but comfortable alien blanket Zehn had provided.

As I closed my eyes, I couldn't shake the image of Khaaz's luminous gaze, or the inexplicable feeling that I'd known him all my life.

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I stalked the perimeter of our makeshift camp, my heightened Rodinian senses cataloging every scent, sound, and shift in the environment.

The forest was quiet but for the occasional rustle of nocturnal creatures and the soft whisper of wind through the canopy.

My paws barely made a sound on the undergrowth, decades of Legion Reaper training allowing me to move like a shadow even in my natural form.

Nothing escaped my notice—not the faint tracks of some small animal heading east, nor the subtle change in air pressure that suggested rain before dawn.

But most importantly, I could sense Khaaz's position as clearly as if we shared a neural link, his scent and energy signature as familiar to me as my own.

The moon cast dappled silver light through the trees, illuminating patches of the forest floor. I extended my claws briefly, testing the air. No predators. No threats. Just the three of us in this small corner of wilderness.

Khaaz was moving in a wider arc around us, keeping to the shadows as he did.

Despite his scars and the experimental hybridization that had been forced upon him, he moved with the same lethal grace as any pure Rodinian.

Perhaps even more so. I knew he wasn't just standing guard—he was giving me space with Everly. Giving us time.

I finished my circuit and retreated back toward our shelter. My ears swiveled, picking up Khaaz's soft growl of acknowledgment from somewhere in the darkness. All clear. We were safe for now.

Inside the small cave we'd claimed for the night, Everly lay curled on her side, her breathing deep and even in sleep.

My chest tightened at the sight of her. Even with dirt smudging her face and her clothes torn from our escape, she was the most beautiful creature I'd ever seen.

My fate mate. The one the universe had chosen for me when I'd thought such a gift impossible.

I moved to her silently, lowering my massive frame beside her sleeping form. Her long black hair had fallen across her face, and I gently brushed it back with one claw-retracted finger, careful not to wake her. She'd been through too much today. Needed rest more than anything.

The scent of her, that unique blend of human female and something else—something that called to the deepest, most primal part of me—filled my nostrils.

I inhaled deeply, letting it center me. Ground me.

The fierce protectiveness that had taken hold of me since the moment we'd shared our first unity dream swelled anew.

I would tear apart anything that threatened her.

I gathered her carefully against me, her small human form fitting perfectly against my larger Rodinian one. She stirred slightly, murmuring something unintelligible in her sleep before nestling closer, seeking my warmth. The trust in that unconscious

movement nearly undid me.

As I held her, I understood why Khaaz had volunteered to take the outer perimeter tonight.

He knew what this time meant—what it could mean—for Everly and me.

Another unity dream could strengthen our bond, help her understand what we were to each other before she had to make her choice.

Before she had to decide whether to accept or reject me.

The thought of rejection sent a cold spike through my chest, but I pushed it aside.

Whatever she chose, I would honor it. Even if it meant succumbing to the deliria amoranta , the madness that claimed unmated Rodinians whose fate mates denied them.

Even if it meant being relegated to the front lines as nothing more than a berserker weapon until death finally claimed me.

She was worth it. Worth anything.

I closed my eyes, my body curving protectively around hers, and allowed myself to drift. To seek that strange between-space where fate mates could connect on a level beyond the physical. The unity dream.

It came more easily this time, like slipping into warm water. One moment I was in the cave, and the next I was somewhere else entirely—a space that existed nowhere and everywhere, created from our shared consciousness.

She was there, waiting. As if she'd been expecting me. Her eyes, those deep dark pools that had captured me from the first moment, watched me with a mixture of desire and wonder. In this space, there was no fear, no hesitation—only the raw truth of what we were to each other.

“Zehn,” she whispered, and the sound of my name on her lips sent heat racing through me.

I moved toward her slowly, savoring the anticipation.

Here, I could be whatever form would please her most. I chose something between my natural state and my Beast Battle form—tall and powerful but not so massive as to frighten her.

My spotted fur gleamed in the dreamlight, my muscles rippling with each step.

“My mate,” I rumbled, the words vibrating from my chest. “My Everly.”

When I reached her, I didn't immediately take her in my arms as every instinct demanded. Instead, I dropped to my knees before her, looking up at her face—at the woman who held my fate in her hands.

“Let me please you,” I said, my voice rougher than I intended. “Let me show you what we can be together.”

Her answer was to thread her fingers through the fur at the back of my head, her small hand a brand against my scalp. Permission. Invitation.

I gripped her hips gently, claws carefully retracted, and buried my face against her stomach, inhaling her scent through the thin fabric of her shirt. She smelled of desire already, her body recognizing mine even if her conscious mind still wrestled with our

connection.

With deliberate slowness, I slid my hands beneath her shirt, pushing it up to reveal inch by inch of soft skin.

Her breathing quickened as I explored her with my palms, memorizing every curve, every dip, every texture.

I lowered my head to press my lips against her navel, tasting her with my tongue, growling my approval at the salt-sweet flavor of her.

She gasped, her fingers tightening in my fur, and I felt her knees weaken. Good. I wanted her undone by pleasure. Wanted to show her how perfectly we fit together.

I eased her down until she was lying before me, her hair spread out like a dark halo.

Her eyes never left mine as I divested her of her clothing, piece by piece, revealing her to my hungry gaze.

In the unity dream, there were no scars from our escape, no bruises from our flight through the forest. Just her, perfect and whole.

When she was naked, I took a moment simply to look at her. The swell of her breasts, the dip of her waist, the flare of her hips—every part of her called to me. Mine, some primal part of me insisted. Ours, another part corrected, thinking of Khaaz.

I lowered myself between her legs, spreading her thighs with gentle but insistent pressure. She was already wet for me, her sex glistening in the dreamlight. The sight of her arousal made my cock throb painfully, but I ignored it. This wasn't about my pleasure. Not yet.

“Zehn,” she breathed, half plea, half demand.

I answered by pressing my face between her thighs, my broad tongue taking a long, slow lap from her entrance to the sensitive bundle of nerves at her apex.

The taste of her exploded across my palate—sweet and tangy and distinctly Everly.

I groaned against her flesh, the vibrations making her arch up toward me.

I lapped at her again and again, alternating between broad strokes and pointed precision, learning what made her moan, what made her gasp, what made her fingers clench in my fur hard enough to hurt in the most delicious way.

I sealed my lips around her clit and sucked gently, feeling her thighs begin to tremble against my shoulders.

While my mouth worked her most sensitive flesh, I brought my hand up, teasing her entrance with one thick finger.

She was so wet now that it slid in easily, and I growled in approval at the way her inner walls clenched around the intrusion.

I curled my finger inside her, seeking that spot that would bring her the most pleasure.

When I found it, she cried out, her back arching off the ground.

I added a second finger, stretching her, preparing her for what was to come while continuing the relentless attention of my tongue.

Her hips began to move in small, desperate circles, seeking more pressure, more

friction, more of everything I was giving her.

“Please,” she gasped, her voice breaking. “Zehn, please, I need?—”

“I know what you need,” I rumbled against her flesh. “I’ll give you everything. Everything.”

I increased the pace of my fingers, thrusting them deeper, faster, while my tongue flicked rapidly against her clit. Her breathing grew ragged, her thighs tensing on either side of my head. She was close—so close.

When her climax hit, it was with a force that made her entire body go rigid. She cried out my name, a sound that sent fire racing through my veins. I continued to lap at her, more gently now, easing her through the aftershocks, until she collapsed back, chest heaving with exertion.

But I wasn’t done with her yet. Not nearly.

I rose above her, my cock hanging heavy and ready between my legs. “Look at me,” I commanded softly, and her eyes fluttered open to meet mine. “I want you to see who’s claiming you.”

She nodded, her gaze never wavering as I positioned myself at her entrance. I rubbed the head of my cock through her slick folds, coating myself in her arousal. Then, with a slow, controlled push, I began to enter her.

The tight heat of her around me was almost enough to undo me then and there. I gritted my teeth, forcing myself to go slowly, to give her time to adjust to my size. Despite her wetness, despite her earlier climax, she was still tight—deliciously, agonizingly tight.

“Fuck,” I hissed, the crude human word slipping out unintentionally. “You feel so good, Everly. So perfect around me.”

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She moaned in response, her hands coming up to grip my forearms, claws sinking into my fur. The small pain grounded me, kept me from driving into her with the ferocity my body demanded.

When I was fully seated inside her, I paused, giving us both a moment to adjust to the sensation. The feeling of completion was overwhelming—like finding a piece of myself I hadn't known was missing. This was more than physical pleasure. This was unity in its truest form.

I began to move, drawing back almost completely before pushing forward again. Each thrust was measured, controlled, though it cost me dearly to maintain that control. I wanted to claim her hard and fast, to mark her as mine in the most primitive way possible. But I wanted her pleasure more.

Her eyes stayed locked on mine, wide and dark with desire. Her lips parted on each exhale, small sounds of pleasure escaping her with every thrust. I leaned down to capture those sounds with my mouth, kissing her deeply as my hips continued their steady rhythm.

“More,” she gasped against my lips. “Harder, Zehn. I need more.”

The request shattered what remained of my restraint. I growled low in my throat and increased my pace, driving into her with enough force to push her slightly across the ground with each thrust. She met me eagerly, her hips rising to meet mine, taking me deeper, urging me on with breathless cries.

I shifted our position, lifting her legs to wrap around my waist, changing the angle to

hit that spot inside her that would bring her the most pleasure.

When I found it, her reaction was immediate—a sharp cry, her nails digging crescents into my arms, her inner walls clenching around me in a preview of her coming release.

“That’s it,” I urged, my voice a guttural rasp. “Take your pleasure, mate. Show me how good I make you feel.”

Her second climax built more slowly than the first, a gradual tightening, a mounting tension I could feel in the way her body gripped mine. I maintained my pace, hitting that spot inside her with relentless precision, watching her face as pleasure overtook her.

When it crashed over her, it was with such intensity that she screamed my name, her entire body convulsing around me. I fought back my own release, determined to wring every last drop of pleasure from her before I allowed myself the same.

Without giving her time to recover, I flipped her over, guiding her to her hands and knees. This position made me growl with satisfaction. I mounted her from behind, one hand gripping her hip, the other braced beside her on the ground as I drove into her with renewed vigor.

The sounds of our coupling filled the dream-space—the slap of flesh against flesh, her breathless moans, my deeper growls, the wet sounds of my cock sliding in and out of her slick heat. It was raw, animalistic, perfect.

I leaned over her, my chest pressed to her back, my mouth at her ear. “Mine,” I growled. “Say it, Everly. Tell me you’re mine.”

“Yours,” she gasped, the word breaking on a moan as I hit particularly deep. “I’m

yours, Zehn. Only yours.”

The admission, dream-given though it might be, pushed me closer to the edge. But I wasn't finished with her yet. I wanted her utterly spent, so satisfied she'd never consider another.

I reached around to where our bodies joined, finding her clit with practiced fingers. I circled it in time with my thrusts, feeling her begin to shake beneath me almost immediately.

“Again,” I demanded. “Come for me again, mate.”

Her third climax ripped through her with such force that her arms gave out, leaving her upper body pressed to the ground while her hips remained elevated, impaled on my cock. The position drove me even deeper, and the tight clench of her inner walls as she came was finally too much to resist.

With a roar that would have frightened her had we been in the waking world, I emptied myself inside her, my release so intense that for a moment, the dream itself seemed to waver around us. Wave after wave of pleasure crashed over me as I filled her, marked her in the most primitive way.

In the unity dream, there was no knot yet—that would come only with her conscious acceptance of our bond in the waking world. But the potential for it throbbed at the base of my cock, a promise of what could be if she chose to accept me.

When the last spasm of pleasure had subsided, I gathered her gently in my arms, rolling us to our sides with my cock still buried inside her. I wanted to stay connected to her as long as possible, to savor this moment of perfect unity before the waking world reclaimed us.

I nuzzled her neck, inhaling her scent, now mixed with my own. The claiming of scents—not as complete as it would be with a mating bite, but a start. A promise.

“I am yours,” I murmured against her skin, the words coming unbidden but true. “Whether you choose to claim me or not, I am utterly yours, Everly. I will never force you to accept our bond. The choice must be yours.”

She turned in my arms, just enough to look at me over her shoulder. In her eyes, I saw a softness, a tenderness that made my heart ache.

“What if I’m afraid?” she whispered.

“Fear is natural,” I told her, brushing a strand of hair from her face.

“What we have—what we could have—it’s bigger than either of us expected.

But know this: I would rather die than cause you pain.

If you need time, I will give you time. If you need space, I will give you space, though it would tear me apart to be separated from you.”

She was quiet for a long moment, just looking at me. Then she reached up to touch my face, her small hand gentle against my cheek.

“I feel it too,” she admitted softly. “This pull toward you. It terrifies me how strong it is.”

Hope flared in my chest, bright and painful. “Then don’t fight it,” I urged. “Let me show you how good it can be. Let me?—”

The dream began to dissolve around us, reality intruding as it always must. The last

thing I saw was her face, thoughtful and tender, before darkness claimed me.

I woke with Everly still cradled against me, her body warm and real in my arms. Outside our shelter, the first hint of dawn lightened the sky. Soon Khaaz would return from his watch, and we would need to move on, continue our journey to safety.

But for now, I simply held her, committing every detail of her sleeping form to memory. Whatever happened next—whether she accepted our bond or denied it—this moment was mine to treasure. She was mine to protect, to care for, to worship if she would allow it.

And if she chose to reject me, to walk away from what the universe had decreed?

I would accept it. I would bear the deliria amoranta, would embrace the madness and the inevitable death that followed, because I had glimpsed perfection in her arms. Had tasted completion in her acceptance, however temporary.

Some things were worth dying for. Everly Flores was one of them.

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I moved like a ghost through the dense undergrowth, my scarred body melting into the shadows as naturally as breathing.

The laboratory complex lay behind me, its sterile corridors now bearing my handiwork—destroyed data banks, corrupted backup systems, and a carefully triggered chemical reaction that would ensure nothing of me remained for them to study. Nothing of what they had created.

The predawn air carried the scents of the jungle, rich and alive, so different from the antiseptic hell where I'd spent years as little more than tissue on a slide.

Freedom tasted sweet, but purpose tasted sweeter.

And I had found both in the fate that had inexplicably bound me to Zehn and the human female who now occupied my thoughts more than self-preservation.

I paused at the ridge overlooking the lab, watching as the last of my fail-safes activated.

A soft blue glow emanated briefly from several windows before fading to darkness.

The electromagnetic pulse would fry any remaining systems I might have missed, rendering useless any data they had collected on my genetic makeup, my abilities, my weaknesses.

The Engineers—what I called them—had spent decades trying to create the perfect hybrid soldier, splicing Rodinian DNA with other species, seeking to combine our

natural strength and hunting prowess with capabilities beyond our kind.

Most subjects died in agony. I survived, though the cost was etched across my body in scars both visible and hidden.

But I wasn't just erasing evidence of myself. I was buying time for us—for Everly. The thought of her sent an uncomfortable heat through my body. My fate mate. Our fate mate.

The pack I'd assembled from the lab sat heavy against my back, filled with salvaged tech that might prove useful.

A Legion-grade communicator, shield modulators, medical supplies, and weapons small enough to conceal but deadly in the right hands.

I'd recognized the technology immediately—the irony wasn't lost on me that my creators had stolen designs from the very Legion that Zehn served.

They'd harvested Rodinian genetics, why not Rodinian tech as well?

Dawn was approaching, painting the eastern sky with the first tentative brushstrokes of light.

I should have returned to camp hours ago, but I'd deliberately stayed away.

My senses, enhanced beyond even normal Rodinian capabilities, had detected the rising pheromones from miles away.

The unity dream. I could feel its echo, the connection that bound the three of us pulling at something deep inside me, like a phantom limb aching for what it had never truly possessed.

Let Zehn have this time with her. Let him show her what a proper Rodinian mate could offer—not some scarred experiment with too-bright eyes and altered genetic coding.

I had no illusions about my place in this strange triangle the universe had forced upon us.

I was the shadow to his light, the broken reflection of what a Rodinian male should be.

With dawn came the knowledge that we needed provisions. Hunting would give me purpose, and more importantly, an excuse to stay away from camp until the unity dream had run its course. I lifted my nose to the wind, scenting the jungle for prey.

There—a herd of something similar to deer found on Terra Prime, but with six legs and branching antlers that curved like question marks. They grazed in a small clearing half a kilometer to the east, away from both the lab and our camp. Perfect.

I dropped to all fours, my body shifting partially toward battle form as I stalked through the underbrush.

The transition wasn't as smooth as it once had been—the prolonged stasis made the shift painful.

But the trade-off was worth it. Enhanced speed, strength beyond even what a normal Rodinian possessed, and senses so acute I could hear the individual heartbeats of the herd animals from this distance.

The hunt was swift and clean. I took down the largest male with a single leap, severing its spine with precision before it could alert the others.

The rest of the herd bolted, but I had no need for more than one.

This would feed all three of us for the day, with perhaps some left to dry for the journey ahead.

As I field-dressed the carcass with practiced efficiency, my mind wandered back to Everly.

To the way she had looked at me when we first met, with recognition rather than fear.

The way my name had fallen from her lips, a whisper that hit me like a physical blow.

She had known me, just as I had known her the moment I caught her scent.

Just as it should when present in unity dreams.

The unity dreams were not supposed to work this way—we did not reveal ourselves to each other the way Zehn and Everly did.

Yet here we were. And while I recognized the bond, felt its pull with every fiber of my being, I also understood the hierarchy.

Zehn was pure Rodinian, a respected Legion Reaper.

I was...something else. A successful experiment, perhaps, but still an aberration.

If she chose, it would be him. As it should be.

I hoisted the dressed carcass over my shoulder, the weight nothing to my enhanced strength, and began the trek back to camp.

The sun had fully risen now, casting dappled light through the jungle canopy.

Birds and insects created a constant symphony around me, and I cataloged each sound automatically, alert for anything out of pattern that might signal danger.

But my vigilance was divided, part of me already reaching toward the camp, toward her.

I could sense them both now—Zehn's familiar energy signature, strong and steady, and Everly's, bright and chaotic like a flame in the wind.

The pheromones had changed, no longer the intense surge of the unity dream but something different. Something real.

I slowed my approach, partly out of tactical caution, partly out of...something I was reluctant to name. Not jealousy—I had no right to such an emotion. But perhaps regret for what could never be mine.

I slipped through the final perimeter of vegetation soundlessly, pausing at the edge of our small clearing. The sight that greeted me sent heat racing through my body despite my best efforts to remain detached.

Zehn sat on a fallen log, his massive frame curled protectively around Everly's smaller one.

His hand was between her legs, hidden beneath the torn fabric of her clothing, but the movement was unmistakable.

Her head was thrown back against his shoulder, eyes closed, lips parted in silent pleasure.

The scent of her arousal hit me like a physical blow, making my claws extend involuntarily, digging into the tree trunk I gripped for stability.

I should have retreated, given them privacy, but some masochistic part of me remained frozen, watching as Zehn's skilled fingers brought her to completion. Her body tensed, a soft cry escaping her lips, before she collapsed against him, boneless with release.

That was when her eyes opened, looking directly into mine across the clearing.

The shock and embarrassment that flooded her face made something in my chest constrict painfully. She scrambled away from Zehn, adjusting her clothing with frantic movements, her cheeks flushed dark with blood.

"I didn't—I wasn't—" She stopped, her breath coming in short gasps. "I'm going to the pond. To clean up."

She fled past me, careful not to make contact, the scent of her lingering in the air like a taunt.

I didn't follow. I had already secured the area around the pond during my earlier patrol, eliminating a predator similar to a crocodile that had taken up residence there.

She would be safe enough for a short time alone.

Zehn remained seated, entirely unashamed, watching me with an unreadable expression.

As I stepped into the clearing, he lifted the hand that had been between Everly's legs to his mouth, deliberately licking his fingers clean while maintaining eye contact.

A display of dominance, a reminder of what had passed between them.

“You were gone longer than expected,” he said, his deep voice casual, as if I hadn’t just witnessed him pleasuring our shared fate mate.

I dropped the carcass near the remnants of last night’s fire. “I had matters to attend to.”

“The lab?”

I nodded, kneeling to rebuild the fire. “Nothing remains that could be used to track us. Or me.”

Zehn was silent as I arranged kindling and struck a spark, nursing the small flame into life.

I kept the smoke low, using dry wood and arranging the stones to direct heat efficiently.

A human comfort—Everly would need it. She wasn’t built for the harsh conditions of this planet, didn’t have our resistance to temperature changes or ability to go days without proper food.

“She’s stronger than she looks,” Zehn said, reading my thoughts with the uncanny accuracy of a fellow predator. “But your consideration is noted.”

I grunted noncommittally, skewering strips of meat to roast over the growing flames. “She’ll need her strength for the journey. We should reach the black site by nightfall if we maintain a steady pace.”

“And if it’s not abandoned?”

I met his gaze steadily. “Then we deal with whoever is there. Or whatever.”

Zehn nodded, accepting the simplicity of the plan. We both knew what we were capable of when fighting together. Even a fully-staffed facility would stand little chance against a Legion Reaper and a hybrid designed specifically for combat.

With the fire established and the meat cooking, I finally removed the pack, laying out my findings methodically on a flat rock. Zehn moved closer, his interest piqued.

“Legion tech,” he observed, picking up the communicator. “Modified, but I recognize the base design.”

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“They stole more than just genetic material,” I confirmed.

“The shield modulators should work with your gauntlet, allowing you to extend protection over a wider area. And this—” I held up a small metallic cylinder, “—is a molecular scrambler. Short range, but it will disable most electronic surveillance within twenty meters.”

Zehn turned the cylinder in his massive hands, examining it with the practiced eye of a warrior who has used countless weapons. “Useful. What else did you find?”

I hesitated, then reached into an inner pocket of the pack, removing a data crystal. “Information. About the experiments. About me.” I met his gaze unflinchingly. “And about the compatibility testing they were doing with human DNA.”

That caught his full attention. His eyes narrowed, suddenly intense. “Human compatibility? With Rodinian genetics?”

“Yes.” I placed the crystal carefully on the rock.

“I’ve only had time to skim the surface data, but they were specifically testing theories about human hybridization.

They believed there was something unique about human genetics that might stabilize the more volatile aspects of the other species they were incorporating. ”

“And did it?”

I gestured to my scarred body, my too-bright eyes. “Partially. I survived where others didn’t. Whether that was due to the human DNA components or simply genetic luck, I can’t say for certain.”

Zehn was quiet for a long moment, processing the implications.

“Humans have been used by many for their malleability. Many have been both heart mates and fate mates to Rodinians over the years. Perhaps this is the reason the universe has chosen Everly as our fate mate. If there’s already a genetic compatibility. ..”

I didn’t allow myself to react to Zehn referring to Everly as “ours.” “Perhaps.” I began organizing the equipment, separating what we would carry from what we would leave behind.

“Or perhaps the universe simply has a cruel sense of humor, binding a human to two males of a species she never knew existed until days ago.”

Zehn’s expression softened slightly. “She recognized you. When she first saw you, she knew your name.”

The memory sent an uncomfortable warmth through me. “A trick of the unity dream. Nothing more.”

“The design of the unity dream.” Zehn leaned forward, his massive frame suddenly imposing despite our similar heights. “You feel the bond as strongly as I do. Perhaps more strongly, given what was done to you.”

I didn’t answer immediately, focusing instead on packing the salvaged tech into more manageable bundles. “What I feel is irrelevant. The choice will be hers, as it should be. And we both know what that choice will be.”

“Do we?” There was something in Zehn’s voice I couldn’t identify—not challenge, not exactly, but something adjacent to it.

I looked up at him, allowing a hint of my frustration to show. “Look at me, Zehn. Look at what they made me. I’m not even fully Rodinian anymore. I’m a patchwork of species, held together by experimental gene therapy and stubborn refusal to die. Why would she choose this when she could have you?”

Zehn’s expression didn’t change, but I caught the subtle shift in his scent—surprise, mixed with something almost like...approval?

“You underestimate yourself, brother,” he said quietly. “And you underestimate her.”

Before I could respond, we both tensed, alerted by the same sound—Everly returning from the pond. She emerged from the treeline looking considerably more composed, her hair wet and slicked back from her face, her clothing adjusted as best as possible given its torn state.

Her eyes skipped over us both, landing on the fire and the roasting meat. “That smells incredible,” she said, her voice carefully neutral, as if the earlier encounter had never happened.

“Khaaz hunted for us,” Zehn replied, his tone casual but his eyes watchful. “And he’s brought some useful equipment from the lab.”

She glanced at me then, a quick, almost shy look that sent an inexplicable jolt through my system. “Thank you,” she said softly.

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak. The air between the three of us felt charged, unbalanced, full of things unsaid. She was poised at the edge of a decision she didn’t fully understand yet, one that would affect all our lives irrevocably.

I turned back to the fire, adjusting the meat to cook evenly. “We should eat and move out within the hour,” I said, keeping my voice professional, detached. “If we maintain a steady pace, we can reach the black site facility by nightfall.”

“And then what?” Everly asked, settling on a rock near the fire, careful to keep distance between herself and both of us.

I met her gaze steadily. “Then we find a way to get you off this planet. Somewhere safe, beyond the Engineer’s reach.”

What I didn’t say—what I couldn’t say—was that if she left, if she rejected the bond, both Zehn and I would eventually succumb to the deliria amoranta.

The madness that claimed unmated Rodinians whose fate mates denied them.

But that was our burden to bear, not hers.

Her freedom to choose was paramount, even if that choice meant our destruction.

“And if this black site isn’t abandoned?” she asked, echoing Zehn’s earlier question.

I allowed myself a small, grim smile. “Then we do what we were made for.”

Her eyes widened slightly, but she didn’t flinch. Instead, she nodded, accepting the reality of our situation with a courage that made something in my chest twist painfully.

“Eat,” I said, softer now. “The day ahead will be challenging.”

As she reached for the offered meat, her fingers briefly brushed mine.

The contact was electric, sending a shock wave through my system that I struggled to conceal.

Her scent, clean from the pond but still underscored with the lingering traces of her earlier arousal, filled my nostrils.

The bond between us hummed like a plucked string, resonant and impossible to ignore.

For a moment, just a moment, I allowed myself to imagine what it might be like if she chose both of us. If the impossible became possible. Then I pushed the thought away, burying it beneath layers of practicality and self-preservation.

I had survived this long by acknowledging reality, not indulging in fantasy. And the reality was that no matter what the universe had decreed, some things were simply too broken to be chosen.

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I focused on chewing the meat, pretending my face wasn't still burning with embarrassment. The taste was surprisingly good—gamey and rich—but I barely registered it through the chaos in my head.

How was I supposed to act normal when less than an hour ago, Zehn's fingers had been inside me, bringing me to a shuddering climax while Khaaz watched from the treeline? And before that, the dream.

God, that dream. The memory of it clung to me like a second skin, making my body hum with an awareness I couldn't shake.

I glanced between the two massive aliens who sat eating as casually as if we were having a picnic in the park rather than hiding from killer drones in an alien jungle after the most mortifying sexual encounter of my life.

Zehn caught my eye and had the audacity to wink. I nearly choked on my food.

"The meat is good," I said stupidly, desperate to fill the silence with anything that wasn't about what had happened. "Thank you for hunting, Khaaz."

Khaaz's luminous eyes flicked to mine briefly before returning to his task of methodically packing equipment. "It was necessary," he said simply, his voice that rough, underused sound that somehow sent shivers down my spine.

I'd woken that morning from the most intense dream I'd ever experienced—Zehn's massive body over mine, his mouth everywhere, my legs wrapped around his waist as he...

I shifted uncomfortably on the rock where I sat.

And then to open my eyes and find Zehn watching me with that knowing look, to have him whisper “You’re not nearly done” before sliding his hand beneath my torn clothing, right there in the open, his fingers finding me already wet from the dream. ..

And I’d been so lost in the sensation that I hadn’t even noticed Khaaz’s return until it was too late, until I’d opened my eyes mid-climax to find him staring at us from across the clearing, his too-bright eyes unreadable, his scarred body tense.

My face heated again at the memory. The rational part of me knew I should be horrified, should be furious at Zehn for putting me in that position. But another part—a part I was trying desperately to ignore—had been thrilled by it. By being caught. By knowing that Khaaz had seen me come apart.

“We should move soon,” Zehn announced, interrupting my thoughts. “Eat your fill, Everly. The journey ahead will require your strength.”

I nodded, focusing on the food again. I needed to get my head straight. We were in danger. Running for our lives. This was not the time to be distracted by...whatever this was.

“The drones that attacked,” I said, grasping for a safer topic, “will there be more?”

“Yes,” Khaaz answered. “But they will send different patterns. Different technologies.”

“They may adapt quickly,” Zehn added. “But so do we.”

They moved with practiced efficiency as they began breaking camp, their massive bodies graceful despite their size.

Zehn disassembled the makeshift shelter while Khaaz extinguished the fire, ensuring no trace of it remained.

I sat uselessly on my rock, watching them work, feeling increasingly out of place.

What did I have to offer in this situation?

I couldn't hunt. Couldn't fight. Couldn't even find my way through this alien jungle without them.

"Here," Zehn tossed me a small pack. "For water and provisions."

I caught it awkwardly. "Thanks."

"You're quiet," he observed, his amber eyes studying me. "Are you in pain?"

I almost laughed. "No. I'm just...feeling pretty useless, to be honest."

Khaaz paused in his work, his luminous gaze flicking toward me.

"My job was data entry," I explained, absently running my fingers over the strange material of the pack.

"Sitting at a desk for eight hours a day, entering numbers into spreadsheets. The most adventurous thing I did was occasionally eat lunch outside when the weather was nice. This?" I gestured around at the jungle.

"This is literally the opposite of everything I've ever prepared for. "

Zehn's expression softened slightly. "What else were you prepared for, then?"

I thought about it, trying to find anything in my mundane Earth existence that might be useful in this situation.

“I can make a pretty decent omelet? Though that’s not much help without eggs.

I know how to navigate public transportation.

I’m pretty good at Excel.” I sighed. “Not seeing a lot of transferable skills here.”

Zehn seemed amused. “What about self-defense? Surely Earth females must protect themselves?”

“I mean, I took a self-defense class once. And I carry pepper spray.” I shrugged. “But I’m guessing that won’t do much against whatever’s hunting us.”

Zehn and Khaaz exchanged a look I couldn’t interpret.

“What about weapons?” Zehn asked. “Have you handled them before?”

“Actually, yeah,” I admitted. “I go to the shooting range regularly. My dad was big on gun safety, and after I moved to the city alone...” I trailed off, suddenly self-conscious.

Zehn’s interest was piqued. “What kinds of weapons?”

“Pistols mostly. Some rifles. I’m better with handguns.”

To my surprise, Khaaz approached, reaching into the pack he’d assembled from the lab. He pulled out what looked like a sleek, metallic handgun, though its design was unlike anything I’d seen on Earth.

“This is a pulse pistol,” he said, his rough voice careful as he offered it to me, handle first. “Similar in concept to your Earth weapons, but it fires concentrated energy rather than projectiles. No recoil.”

I took it hesitantly, feeling its weight. It was lighter than it looked, the grip conforming to my hand as if custom-made.

“There is no safety mechanism as you would understand it,” Zehn explained, stepping closer. “It’s keyed to biometrics. Once you’ve fired it, it will recognize only your hand signature.”

“So it won’t work for anyone else?” I asked.

“It will still fire,” Khaaz said, “but with reduced accuracy and power. A failsafe in case the weapon is stolen.”

“Clever,” I murmured, examining the pistol more carefully. There was a small indicator on the side, glowing blue. “What’s this for?”

“Power level,” Zehn said. “Blue is full charge. Yellow is half. Red means you have perhaps three shots remaining before it needs recharging.”

“And how do I recharge it?”

Khaaz stepped closer, his scarred body towering over me. “There are power cells in the pack. I’ll show you later.”

Zehn gestured toward a fallen log about twenty meters away. “Try it. Aim for the notch in the center.”

I hesitated, glancing around. “Won’t the sound attract attention?”

Zehn's mouth curved slightly. "It's nearly silent. The energy discharge creates a soft heat wave that dissipates quickly."

I lifted the weapon, sighting along its barrel. The notch in the log was small, maybe three centimeters wide. I took a breath, steadied my aim, and pulled the trigger.

There was no bang, no kickback—just a soft whoosh of air and a flash of blue light. The log exploded at exactly the point I'd aimed, sending splinters flying.

"Holy shit," I breathed.

Zehn grinned, a predatory expression that shouldn't have been as attractive as it was. "Again. The tree to the left, the damaged branch."

I pivoted, sighted, and fired in one fluid motion. The branch disintegrated.

"The stone by the water's edge," Khaaz suggested, his voice holding a note I hadn't heard before—approval?

I hit it dead center, the stone cracking neatly in two.

"Impressive," Zehn said, and the pride in his voice made something warm unfurl in my chest. "Your aim is exceptional."

"It's easier without the recoil," I admitted. "But thanks."

"Here," Khaaz handed me a holster from the pack. "It attaches to your thigh or hip, whichever you prefer."

I strapped it to my thigh, sliding the pulse pistol into place. It felt right there, a comforting weight against my leg.

“Rodinian females are fierce warriors,” Zehn said, watching me adjust the holster. “It is one of our most valued traits. A strong mate who can defend herself and her young is highly prized.”

I glanced up at him, unsure how to respond to that.

“It is an honor when such a female yields to a warrior,” he continued, his amber eyes holding mine. “Her strength makes her submission a gift, not a weakness.”

My cheeks heated again, but not from embarrassment this time. Something about the way he said it—like he was including me in that category of strong, fierce females—made me stand a little straighter.

“I’m not sure how fierce I am,” I said, “but I can definitely shoot.”

Khaaz approached with another weapon, this one longer, more like a rifle. “This has greater range and power,” he explained. “The principles are the same.”

For the next twenty minutes, they taught me how to use the rifle, adjusting my stance, showing me how to compensate for distance.

To my surprise, I was good at it—really good.

Each shot hit exactly where I aimed, the weapon’s lack of recoil allowing for a precision I’d never achieved with Earth guns.

“Keep them both,” Zehn decided, watching as I disintegrated a fruit hanging from a distant tree. “And these.” He handed me three knives of varying sizes, each with a blade that seemed to shimmer with an inner light.

“Molecular edge,” Khaaz explained, seeing my fascination with the blades. “They’ll

cut through most materials with minimal effort.”

I carefully stored the knives in the pack and the holsters they provided. For the first time since being dragged into this mess, I felt something close to confidence. I might not be a seven-foot alien warrior, but I could contribute. I could defend myself.

“We should move,” Khaaz said, scanning the sky. “We’ve been in one place too long.”

We broke camp quickly after that, leaving no trace of our presence.

Zehn took point, leading us through the dense jungle with a silent grace that belied his massive size.

Khaaz brought up the rear, his luminous eyes constantly scanning for threats.

I walked between them, the pulse rifle slung across my back, the pistol secure against my thigh.

The jungle was alive around us, filled with sounds and scents I couldn’t identify.

Strange birds called from the canopy, their cries like nothing I’d heard on Earth.

Small creatures scurried through the undergrowth, some with too many legs, others with none at all.

Under different circumstances, I might have found it fascinating.

Now, each unknown sound made me tense, my hand drifting to the pistol at my thigh.

We moved in silence, the two aliens communicating through gestures and looks I was

slowly beginning to decipher.

Every hour or so, they would change positions without a word, Khaaz taking the lead while Zehn fell back to guard our rear.

It was clearly a practiced routine, and I wondered how much of that was due to instincts.

The day wore on, the alien sun tracking across the sky.

Despite my office job and general indoor lifestyle, I kept pace better than I expected.

Maybe it was adrenaline, or maybe something about this planet's gravity was different from Earth's.

Either way, I managed to follow Zehn's punishing pace without complaint, determined not to be dead weight.

As the sun began to set, painting the sky in shades of purple and orange that reminded me how far I was from home, Zehn signaled a halt. He and Khaaz conferred quietly, their deep voices too low for me to catch more than a word or two.

"We'll make camp here," Zehn announced, gesturing upward. "The canopy is thick enough to provide cover from aerial surveillance."

I looked up. The trees here were massive, their trunks wider than cars, their branches creating a dense network overhead. "We're sleeping in the trees?"

"A hide-high," Khaaz confirmed. "I'll secure the perimeter while Zehn constructs it."

I watched, amazed, as Zehn scaled one of the trees with ease, his claws digging into

the bark. He moved through the branches with a grace that seemed impossible for his size, weaving together a platform using materials from his pack and the natural resources around him.

Within half an hour, he had created a sturdy structure nestled among the thickest branches, complete with a small covered area for shelter. He dropped a rope ladder, securing it to a branch.

“Can you climb?” he asked.

I eyed the ladder dubiously. “I think so.”

I grabbed the rope and began to climb, the ladder swaying slightly under my weight. About halfway up, my foot slipped, and I let out a small yelp of surprise.

Instantly, Zehn was there, descending with impossible speed. His strong arm wrapped around my waist, steadying me. “I have you,” he murmured, his breath warm against my ear.

My heart raced, and not just from the near-fall. Being this close to him—feeling the heat of his massive body, breathing in his wild, spicy scent—brought back vivid memories of the dream, of his hands on my body, his mouth...

“I’m okay,” I managed, my voice embarrassingly breathless. “Just slipped.”

He didn’t release me immediately. Instead, he kept his arm around me as we climbed together, supporting most of my weight as if I were no heavier than a child.

When we reached the platform, I was surprised by how spacious it was—large enough for all three of us with room to spare, and surprisingly comfortable.

Khaaz joined us a few minutes later, bringing the rest of our supplies. He handed out portions of the meat he'd preserved from his earlier hunt, now dried and jerky-like. I ate mechanically, suddenly overwhelmed by the day's events and the bone-deep exhaustion that had been building for hours.

Zehn settled beside me, his massive body radiating heat in the cooling evening air. "Rest," he said softly. "We have a long journey tomorrow."

I meant to argue, to insist that I could take a watch shift too, but my eyes were already closing.

The last thing I was aware of was a deep, rumbling sound coming from Zehn's chest. A soothing, rhythmic vibration that seemed to penetrate my very bones, lulling me into the deepest sleep I'd had since this whole nightmare began.

As consciousness slipped away, I found myself wondering if Khaaz could purr too, and what it would feel like to be held between them both, surrounded by that comforting sound from all sides.

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The stars were foreign here, a scattered pattern I couldn't read.

I leaned against the rough stone wall, my claws tracing absently along the weathered surface as I kept watch.

Behind me, Everly's soft breathing was the metronome that kept my heart steady.

Her scent—sweet, intoxicating—mingled with Khaaz's more feral musk.

The combination should have raised my hackles. Instead, I found it oddly...right.

Today had been a revelation. Khaaz and I had moved around Everly like twin satellites, anticipating each other's movements, covering blind spots, communicating with barely a glance.

There had been no awkward collisions, no stepping on each other's tails.

It was as if we had trained together for decades.

I rubbed my thumb over the hilt of my blade, the worn leather familiar against my pad. The synchronicity shouldn't have been possible. Rodinians were territorial by nature, especially when it came to potential mates. Yet here we were, two predators circling the same prey, and somehow coexisting.

Multiple heart mates weren't unheard of in Rodinian society. Some females took two or even three companions, especially in the outlying colonies where females were scarce. But heart mates were a choice—a conscious decision to build a life together.

Fate mates were something else entirely.

I closed my eyes, letting my other senses take over. The night creatures chittered and called around us, a symphony of life that masked our presence. I couldn't recall a single tale, not even from the ancient histories, of a female with two fate mates.

And yet, the unity dreams didn't lie. Everly called to both of us, her soul a beacon that had pulled us across the stars. Both of us.

I glanced at Khaaz's silent form, his scarred body coiled tension ready to spring on any intruders. We were more alike than I'd initially wanted to admit. Both of us killers. Both of us lost in our own ways. Both of us finding our center in her.

The Legion had taught me structure, discipline, a code to live by when the universe offered none. Khaaz had never had that. His life had been a series of cages and labs, scalpels and pain. I wondered if that made him stronger or weaker than me. Perhaps neither. Perhaps just different.

Khaaz treated the situation with a cavalier attitude, resigned in the belief that Everly would not choose him over me.

But I knew better. I had seen warriors fall to the deliria amoranta.

Had watched as proud, disciplined Rodinians devolved into feral shells of themselves, their minds consumed by the pain of rejection.

They became weapons, nothing more—sent to the most desperate fronts, used until they broke or died. Usually both.

I wouldn't condemn Khaaz to that fate. Despite our differences, despite the primitive territorial instinct that sometimes urged me to tear his throat out, I wouldn't leave him

to that darkness.

My claws extended reflexively at the thought, scraping against stone with a soft screech. I forced them to retract, focusing on my breathing.

The truth that Khaaz seemed unwilling to acknowledge was that Everly hadn't been given a proper choice.

Events had moved too quickly—escape, survival, the constant threat of pursuit.

She had fallen into our arms out of necessity as much as desire.

She deserved the dignity of a true choice, made without the pressure of imminent death hanging over her.

A choice that Khaaz saw as binary: him or me.

But my years in the Legion had taught me to see beyond the obvious tactical solutions.

I had watched societies across the stars, studied their customs, learned their ways.

Not all cultures shared the Rodinian exclusivity when it came to mating.

Some embraced more...complex arrangements.

And wasn't that the solution staring us in the face? Everly could choose both of us. The thought should have repulsed me, should have triggered every territorial instinct bred into my genes. Instead, it settled in my mind with unexpected comfort, like a weapon perfectly balanced for my hand.

Khaaz stilled, his iridescent eyes catching the moonlight as they flicked toward me. Even now, he had sensed a change in the air, in me, that he responded to. He assessed the surroundings in a heartbeat before his gaze settled on me.

“All quiet?” he asked, his voice a low rumble that wouldn’t disturb Everly.

I nodded. “No sign of pursuit. Rest. I’ll take first watch.”

His eyes narrowed slightly, reading something in my stance or scent. “You need rest too.”

“Later,” I said, my tone making it clear this wasn’t a suggestion but an order.

He hesitated, glancing down at Everly’s sleeping form. I knew what he was thinking—that I was trying to separate them, assert dominance, stake my claim while he slept.

“She’s safe with me,” I said softly. “As are you.”

Surprise flickered across his scarred features. Then, slowly, he nodded and settled down beside Everly, curving his body around her smaller one. His arm draped protectively over her waist, but his posture had relaxed.

I returned to my vigil, my back to the wall, facing the darkness beyond our small sanctuary. My thoughts circled back to the revelation that had settled in my mind: Everly could choose us both. It wasn’t a compromise. It was a solution. Maybe the only one that wouldn’t end in blood and grief.

I let the night sounds wash over me, my senses alert for any disturbance, any scent or sound that didn’t belong. Behind me, my fate mate slept in the arms of another male who was, against all odds, becoming something other than my enemy. Something I

didn't yet have a name for.

The dream came like a storm—sudden, powerful, overwhelming.

Everly lay before us, her body bare and perfect, stretched between Khaaz and me like an offering.

Her sun-darkened skin gleamed with a soft light that seemed to emanate from within, highlighting the curves and valleys of her form.

Her black hair spilled across the surface beneath her, her eyes half-lidded with desire as she gazed up at us.

My body responded instantly, primal and hungry, as I lowered myself between her thighs.

Her scent was intoxicating, more potent here in the dreamscape than in waking life.

I inhaled deeply, letting it flood my senses until I could taste her on my tongue before I'd even touched her.

When I finally did, pressing my mouth against the slick heat of her core, she arched beneath me with a gasp that sent lightning down my spine.

I savored her, my tongue tracing every fold, every secret place, mapping her pleasure with deliberate precision.

Above me, Khaaz had claimed her upper body, his scarred hands cupping her breasts, weighing them, his thumbs brushing over her nipples until they peaked hard against his rough pads.

His mouth followed, teeth grazing the sensitive buds before his tongue flicked across them, drawing another cry from Everly's throat.

I watched them through hooded eyes as I continued my assault on her senses.

Khaaz's shimmering gaze met mine over the expanse of her body.

There was no challenge there, no territorial warning.

Instead, I saw a reflection of my own hunger, my own need.

We were mirrors, he and I, reflecting the same desire from different angles.

Everly's thighs trembled against my shoulders, her hips lifting to press harder against my mouth.

I gripped them firmly, holding her in place as I drove my tongue deeper, tasting her essence, drowning in it.

Her hands clutched at the surface beneath her, her back arching as her first climax washed over her.

I didn't let up, working her through it, prolonging the pleasure until she was gasping, begging in broken syllables.

Only then did I rise, positioning myself between her legs, the head of my cock pressing against her entrance. I was painfully hard, throbbing with need, but I held myself back, savoring the moment of anticipation.

"Please," she whispered, her eyes locking with mine, then shifting to Khaaz. "Both of you. I need you both."

That was all it took. I drove forward, burying myself to the hilt in a single powerful thrust. She was tight, wet, perfect—her body gripping mine like she was made for me.

For us. Her cry of pleasure echoed in the dreamspace, resonating through me, through Khaaz, binding us together in her response.

I established a rhythm, deep and steady, each thrust sending waves of pleasure through all three of us.

In this shared dream, the boundaries between our sensations blurred.

I could feel my own penetration and simultaneously experience her reception of it—the stretch, the fullness, the exquisite pressure against her most sensitive spots.

Khaaz continued his attention to her breasts, his mouth alternating between them, his hands holding her steady against my increasingly forceful thrusts. Her body was a bridge between us, connecting us in ways I'd never imagined possible.

Without conscious thought, I reached forward, threading my fingers into Khaaz's dark mane.

His fur was coarser than Everly's hair, thicker, but no less pleasing to touch.

I tightened my grip, tugging him upward, away from Everly's breasts.

He growled low in his throat, the sound vibrating against my palm.

Our eyes met, gold against silver, predator to predator.

Then I pulled him closer, closing the distance between us, my mouth claiming his

with the same possessive hunger I'd shown Everly.

Our teeth clashed, sharp fangs scraping against each other, drawing pinpricks of blood that mingled on our tongues.

The taste was electric—copper and musk and something uniquely his.

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I explored his mouth thoroughly, my tongue sliding against his, asserting dominance even as I recognized his strength. Beneath us, Everly moaned, her hands reaching up to touch us both, her body writhing as I continued to thrust into her, never breaking my rhythm.

When I finally pulled back, my grip on Khaaz's mane tightened, controlling him, directing him. There was no hesitation in me now, no confusion about what I wanted—what we all needed.

“Let her taste you,” I ordered, my voice rough with desire and command. Khaaz's eyes flicked to mine, something sharp and unreadable flashing in their depths.

Then, slowly, he nodded. Understanding. Accepting.

Everly gasped as he moved, shifting his position, his knees braced on either side of her shoulders.

His cock, thick and ridged, brushed against her lips, the tip already glistening with pre-cum.

She hesitated—just for a breathless second, her eyes darting between his length and my face, seeking confirmation.

I nodded, encouraging her, giving her permission to embrace this shared pleasure.

Then she opened for him, her lips parting, her pink tongue darting out to taste the bead of moisture at his tip. Khaaz groaned, his head falling back at the first contact.

She took him deeper, her mouth stretching around his girth, her throat working as she adjusted to his size.

The sight was mesmerizing—her lips wrapped around him, her body accepting me below. I drove into her harder, deeper, timing my thrusts to match the rhythm of her mouth on Khaaz. Each time I bottomed out inside her, she took him deeper, creating a perfect synchrony of pleasure.

Her body was fire and silk around me, her inner walls clenching with each thrust, drawing me deeper, demanding more. I gave it to her, unleashing the force I usually held in check, knowing in this dreamscape she could take all of me, all of us.

Khaaz's hands tangled in her hair, guiding her movements, his breath coming in harsh pants that matched my own. We moved together, the three of us locked in a dance of pleasure, each movement amplifying the others.

“Mine,” I growled, the word encompassing both of them. “Both of you.”

In response, Everly's inner muscles clamped down on me, her climax crashing through her, through me, through Khaaz. The shared sensation pushed me over the edge, my release pouring into her as Khaaz found his own completion, his seed spilling down her throat as she swallowed around him.

We were bound in that moment—claimed, unified, complete in a way I'd never experienced before. The boundaries between us dissolved, pleasure coursing through our shared consciousness like lightning through conductive metal.

And in that moment of perfect clarity, I knew with absolute certainty: I would never let either of them go. This wasn't just about Everly choosing between us. This was about the three of us choosing each other. A new kind of bond, unprecedented perhaps, but no less real. No less fated.

The realization settled into my bones with the weight of truth. We belonged together—all three of us. Any other arrangement would be incomplete, a fragment of what we could be together.

As the dream began to fade around me, our bodies still entwined, still pulsing with shared pleasure, I held onto that certainty like a lifeline.

I woke with a gasp, my chest heaving as if I'd sprinted through a battlefield.

The dream clung to me like a second skin, visceral and potent, every sensation still blazing through my nerves.

My body was taut, painfully aroused, my claws digging into the rough ground beneath me.

For a moment, I couldn't separate reality from the dreamscape, the borders between them blurred by the intensity of what I'd experienced.

The night air was cool against my fur, a stark contrast to the heat that still radiated from my core.

I forced my breathing to slow, willing my heartbeat to follow suit as I oriented myself in the physical world once more.

The stars had shifted in the sky, marking the passage of hours, though the night still held firm.

Beside me, Everly and Khaaz remained locked in sleep.

They had gravitated toward each other during the night, their bodies fitting together like puzzle pieces designed by some cosmic hand.

Everly was nestled between us, her back pressed against my side, her face turned into Khaaz's chest. His arm was draped protectively over her waist, his scarred hand splayed across her hip.

In sleep, his features had softened, the perpetual wariness absent.

I hoped they still shared in the unity dream, or perhaps started one anew for just the two of them. The thought sent another pulse of heat through my body, but I tamped it down to focus on the night watch.

They needed rest. The journey had taxed Everly especially, though she would die before admitting it—her human body wasn't designed for the punishing pace we'd maintained. And Khaaz, for all his genetically enhanced stamina, had endured a far greater pain for longer than I had.

I shifted carefully, extracting myself from their tangle of limbs without disturbing them.

Everly made a small sound of protest in her sleep, her hand reaching blindly for the warmth I'd taken away.

I caught it gently, pressing my lips to her palm before placing it back against Khaaz's chest. He instinctively pulled her closer, his breath ruffling her dark hair.

Taking up my position against the wall once more, I resumed my vigil. The dream had changed things—clarified them in ways I hadn't expected. What had seemed impossible now felt inevitable. The three of us, bound together not by convention or tradition, but by something deeper, more primal.

Let them sleep. I would guard their dreams as fiercely as I would guard their lives. And when they woke, we would face whatever came next. Together.

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I woke with the phantom sensation of claws against my skin and fangs at my throat.

The dream clung to me like sweat, intimate and impossible to ignore.

My body hummed with lingering pleasure, a delicious ache between my thighs reminding me of what had transpired in our shared dreamscape.

I kept my eyes shut, mortification washing over me in waves.

How was I supposed to look either of them in the eye after that?

After they had both thoroughly claimed me, marked me, ruined me for anyone else?

I'd never been the center of such focused, primal attention before—and certainly never from two enormous alien cat-men simultaneously.

The air around me shifted, and I caught the rich, spicy scent of cooked meat. My stomach growled in response, betraying my consciousness. So much for pretending to be asleep until I figured out how to face them.

“Ah, she wakes,” Zehn’s deep voice rumbled from somewhere above me. “Sleep well, kitten?”

The suggestive lilt in his tone made heat flood my cheeks. I cracked one eye open to find him crouched nearby, golden eyes gleaming with amusement and something darker, more possessive. He was holding what looked like freshly cooked meat on a makeshift spit.

“Where did you get that?” I asked, my voice raspy from sleep, deliberately ignoring his question.

“Hunted while you two were still lost in dreams,” he said, tearing off a piece and offering it to me. “Eat. You’ll need your strength.”

The way he said it—laden with meaning, with promise—made the heat in my cheeks spread throughout my body. I pushed myself up to sitting, wincing slightly at the stiffness in my muscles. Running around through alien wilderness weren’t exactly what my desk-job body was conditioned for.

Khaaz was already awake, pacing along the edge of our hide-high, his scarred form silhouetted against the early morning light.

He glanced back at me, and I caught the flash of his iridescent eyes.

Unlike Zehn, he didn’t mention the dream, but the intensity of his gaze told me he remembered every detail.

Every touch, every taste, every shared moment of pleasure.

I accepted the meat from Zehn, our fingers brushing in the exchange. Even that small contact sent electricity racing up my arm. “Thank you,” I mumbled, focusing intently on the food to avoid meeting his knowing eyes.

The meat was surprisingly tender, seasoned with something that tasted vaguely like garlic but wasn’t quite.

In that moment, it rated higher than all the luxury dinners I treated myself to, and devoured it with gusto.

Amazing how quickly priorities shifted when you were on the run for your life on an alien planet.

“Water?” Zehn offered, holding out a container that hadn’t been there last night.

“Did you rob a convenience store while we were sleeping?” I asked, accepting it gratefully.

His lips twitched in what might have been a smile. “There’s a stream half a kilometer down the mountain. The container was in my pack.”

I drank deeply, the cool water washing away the last vestiges of sleep.

It didn’t, however, wash away the memory of the dream.

Of Zehn’s mouth between my thighs, of Khaaz’s length down my throat, of the three of us connected in ways that defied conventional relationships.

The water suddenly went down the wrong pipe, and I sputtered, coughing.

Zehn’s large hand was instantly at my back, patting with surprising gentleness. “Easy,” he murmured. “Breathe.”

When I could speak again, I gestured toward Khaaz. “What’s the plan for today? More walking until my feet fall off?”

Khaaz turned his full attention to us, his expression serious. “The facility is just ahead, within a day’s travel. I haven’t detected any drones in the area, but that doesn’t mean they’re not there. We should remain under the cloaking field regardless.”

The cloaking field was another marvel of alien technology—a small device Zehn

carried that apparently bent light around us, making us virtually invisible to electronic surveillance.

I didn't fully understand how it worked, but I was grateful for it.

It had kept us hidden from whatever was hunting Khaaz—and by extension, now hunting me.

“So we're almost there,” I said, relief evident in my voice. “And then what?”

Zehn and Khaaz exchanged a look that I couldn't interpret. There was an entire conversation happening in that silent communication, one I wasn't privy to.

“Then we find a way to get you home,” Zehn said finally, his tone neutral. Too neutral. “If that's what you want.”

Something in my chest constricted painfully at the thought, but I pushed the feeling aside.

Of course that's what I wanted. Earth. Home.

My apartment. My job. My life. The normal, human world where I didn't have to run for my life or worry about alien hunters or navigate the complicated dynamics of whatever this was between the three of us.

“Right,” I said, matching his neutral tone. “Home.”

We broke camp efficiently, each of us falling into the routine we'd established over the past days.

I rolled up the thermal blanket that had served as my bedding, stuffing it into the pack

Zehn had given me.

It was significantly lighter than theirs, containing only essential supplies and none of the other bulk they both carried.

Even so, my shoulders protested as I hoisted it.

As we set off, me sandwiched between my two protectors as usual, I made a silent promise to join a gym if—when—I got back to Earth. No more takeout dinners eaten while hunched over my laptop. No more elevator instead of stairs. No more excuses.

The landscape here was beautiful in a stark, alien way.

Red-tinged rock formations rose around us, their shapes like nothing I'd seen on Earth.

Vegetation was sparse but tenacious, clinging to cracks in the stone, their colors ranging from deep purple to a green so dark it was almost black.

The sky above was a pale lavender, streaked with wispy clouds that moved too quickly across the horizon.

In another context, this might have been the adventure vacation of a lifetime. Instead, it was a desperate flight from forces I still didn't fully understand, guided by two males from a species I hadn't known existed until a week ago.

My thoughts drifted as we walked, my body falling into the familiar rhythm of the hike.

What would it be like to go back to my apartment after this?

To the gray-beige walls and generic furniture, the stack of take-out menus in the kitchen drawer, the endless stream of data entry that constituted my job?

The thought felt hollow, like trying to squeeze back into clothes I'd outgrown.

Here, despite the danger and discomfort, every moment felt vibrant, immediate.

The food, though simple, tasted more real than any five-star restaurant meal I'd ever had.

The nights under alien stars, wrapped in warmth and safety despite the constant threat, were more restful than any night in my memory foam mattress.

And then there were Zehn and Khaaz themselves. Two sides of the same coin—Zehn disciplined and controlled, Khaaz feral and unpredictable. Both lethal. Both protective. Both fixated on me in a way no human man had ever been.

The dream had only confirmed what I'd been feeling since they found me—that I belonged with them in some inexplicable, cosmic way. That we were connected by something deeper than circumstance or convenience or even attraction.

The thought of never seeing them again after we reached the facility hit me with unexpected force. A physical pain lanced through my chest, stealing my breath, making me stumble on the uneven ground. Zehn's hand shot out, steadying me before I could fall.

"Everly?" His voice was sharp with concern. "What is it?"

"Nothing," I gasped, trying to regain my composure. "Just lost my footing."

His amber eyes narrowed, studying my face with unnerving intensity. "Your scent

changed. You're in distress."

I'd forgotten about their enhanced senses. Lying to them was pointless, apparently.

"I'm fine," I insisted, straightening my shoulders. "Just tired. And sore. And wondering if we're actually going to make it to this facility without something trying to kill us again."

Khaaz had doubled back, alerted by our pause. "What's wrong?" he demanded, his gaze sweeping the area for threats.

"Nothing," I repeated, frustration edging my voice. "Can we just keep moving?"

"No," Zehn said firmly. "We rest. Now."

I opened my mouth to protest, but the look on his face stopped me. This wasn't a suggestion; it was an order. And despite everything in me that wanted to argue on principle, I found myself oddly comforted by his decisiveness.

Khaaz nodded in agreement, his eyes flickering between Zehn and me. "This ridge provides good cover. I'll scout ahead, check for perimeter sensors. The facility might have automated defenses still active."

Zehn hesitated, clearly torn between wanting to stay with me and the tactical advantage of having Khaaz survey the terrain. "Be careful," he finally said. "Stay under the cloak. Fifteen minutes, then return."

Khaaz's lips curled in what might have been amusement. "Concerned for my welfare, Reaper?" he asked.

"Concerned for our mission," Zehn corrected, but there was no real bite to his words.

Something had shifted between them since the dream—a new understanding, perhaps, or at least a temporary truce.

Khaaz approached me, his movements fluid and predatory. Without warning, he leaned in, his nose skimming along my jawline in a gesture that was both alien and intimately familiar. He inhaled deeply, as if memorizing my scent.

“Rest,” he murmured, his breath hot against my skin. “I’ll return soon.”

Then he was gone, disappearing among the rocks with a grace that belied his size. I stared after him, my heart hammering in my chest, my skin tingling where he’d been so close.

Zehn guided me to a flat boulder, gently pressing me down to sit. He removed his pack and then mine, setting them aside before lowering himself beside me. The rock was warm from the alien sun, the heat seeping through my clothes, soothing my aching muscles.

“Now,” he said, his voice gentle but firm, “tell me what’s really troubling you.”

I looked away, focusing on the alien landscape spread before us. “I told you, I’m fine. Just tired.”

“Everly.” Just my name, but the way he said it—a command, a plea, a promise—broke something loose inside me.

“I don’t know if I want to go home,” I whispered, the admission torn from someplace deep and vulnerable.

He was silent for a long moment, so long that I finally turned to look at him. His expression was unreadable, but his eyes—those amber eyes that seemed to see right

through me—were intense with emotion.

“And why is that?” he asked carefully, as if testing the ground before committing his weight to it.

How could I explain it? That the thought of returning to my monotonous life felt like a prison sentence now?

That the idea of never seeing him or Khaaz again created a physical pain I couldn’t rationalize?

That I’d never felt more alive than I did here, running for my life with two alien warriors as my protectors?

“My life there...” I gestured vaguely, struggling to find the words. “It’s just so...empty. Data entry. Takeout. Streaming. Sleep. Repeat. Here, everything is...more. The colors are brighter. The food tastes better. The danger is real, not just something I read about online.”

I took a deep breath, forcing myself to meet his gaze. “And there’s you. And Khaaz. Whatever this is between us... I’ve never felt anything like it. The thought of losing that, of losing you both, hurts in a way I can’t explain.”

Zehn’s hand moved to cover mine, his palm rough with calluses, his claws carefully retracted. The warmth of his touch sent a shiver through me that had nothing to do with the alien climate.

“The unity dreams don’t lie, Everly,” he said softly. “What you’re feeling—what we’re all feeling—it’s real. It’s rare. Among my people, it’s sacred.”

“But how can it work?” I asked, the question that had been haunting me since the first

dream. “You and Khaaz can barely tolerate each other. And I’m human. I don’t belong in your world any more than you belong in mine.”

His fingers tightened around mine. “You belong. Fate mates are sacred. Regardless, we belong in a world we make for ourselves,” he suggested, his voice low and intense. “Between the stars. Beyond the boundaries others have set.”

The thought was simultaneously terrifying and exhilarating. To leave behind everything I knew—my planet, my species, my understanding of what relationships should be—for something entirely new. Something undefined.

“I’m scared,” I admitted, my voice barely audible.

“Good,” he said, surprising me. “Fear keeps you sharp. Keeps you alive. But don’t let it rule you, Everly. Don’t let it make your choices for you.”

In the distance, a shadow moved among the rocks—Khaaz returning from his scouting mission. Zehn tracked his progress with predatory focus, but his hand remained on mine, a bridge between us, a promise of possibility.

“Think on it,” he said, rising to his feet in one fluid motion. “The choice is yours, always. But know this—neither Khaaz nor I will let you go easily. Not now. Not after sharing unity.”

The possessiveness in his tone should have frightened me. Instead, it sent a thrill of anticipation through my body, a feeling of belonging I’d never experienced before.

Khaaz reached us, his iridescent eyes taking in our proximity, our postures, the lingering touch of Zehn’s hand on mine. Rather than jealousy, I saw understanding in his gaze, acceptance of whatever had passed between us in his absence.

“The path is clear,” he reported. “No active sensors detected. But we should move quickly. Daylight fades fast in this region.”

Zehn nodded, lifting our packs with effortless strength. “Lead on.”

As we resumed our journey, I found myself walking taller, my steps more purposeful.

The future was still uncertain, fraught with dangers I couldn’t foresee.

But for the first time since I’d been stranded on this alien world, I allowed myself to consider that maybe, just maybe, going back to Earth wasn’t the only path forward.

Maybe home wasn’t a place at all, but the space between two warriors who had claimed me as their own. And maybe that was exactly where I belonged.

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The scent of decay and abandonment filled my nostrils as I approached the facility.

Old memories stirred—the smell of sterile labs, of fear, of pain—but I pushed them aside.

This wasn't about me or my past. This was about keeping Everly safe.

My claws extended and retracted unconsciously as I surveyed the perimeter, every sense heightened, every muscle tense.

Better me facing whatever dangers lurked within these walls than her. Better me than our mate.

The sun hung low on the horizon, casting long shadows across the weathered exterior of what had once been an Engineer outpost. Thick vegetation had reclaimed much of the structure, vines crawling up the walls like grasping fingers. Nature always won in the end. I knew that better than most.

I glanced back toward our makeshift camp, just visible through the tree line. Zehn was keeping Everly occupied with setting up what should be our last night outdoors. Tomorrow we'd reach our destination—if we survived tonight. If this facility didn't hold any nasty surprises.

The weight of my responsibility settled between my shoulder blades like a physical thing.

I'd been created as a weapon, a hybridized experiment—part Rodinian, part

something else the Kridrin had spliced into my genetic code.

Something savage that I kept caged inside except when it was needed.

Right now, that savagery kept my senses sharp as I circled the building's perimeter, testing for traps.

Engineers were meticulous. They never abandoned a post without leaving something behind—proximity mines, automated defenses, biological deterrents. I'd learned that the hard way on three separate occasions. The scars that crisscrossed my body told that story better than words ever could.

A small gap in the exterior wall offered entry.

I crouched, sniffing the air around it. No chemical traces.

No telltale electrical hum. I extended my claws and scraped them along the edge of the opening, testing for trigger mechanisms. Nothing.

Still, I proceeded with caution as I slipped through the gap and into the dimness beyond.

The interior was cooler, the air stale with disuse. Emergency lighting glowed faintly along the baseboards, casting an eerie blue tint over everything. So the power systems were still operational—interesting. Most abandoned facilities ran dark after a few years without maintenance.

I moved silently through the corridors, avoiding debris and fallen ceiling panels.

My night vision revealed what human eyes would miss—the subtle indications of a hasty departure.

Knocked-over chairs. A mug with remnants of some long-dried beverage.

Personal items left behind as though their owners had fled in a hurry.

“What were you running from?” I murmured, my voice sounding unnaturally loud in the silent space.

A door to my right stood partially open.

I pushed it wider with my foot, claws at the ready.

Inside, a bank of computer terminals lined the wall.

Most were dark, but one glowed with the same faint blue as the emergency lighting.

I approached it cautiously, ears swiveling to catch any sound of automated defenses powering up.

The terminal responded to my presence, its screen brightening. Text scrolled across it, too fast for even my enhanced vision to track. Then it stabilized, displaying what appeared to be a communication log. I leaned closer, my breath fogging the screen slightly.

FACILITY DECOMMISSION ORDER: PRIORITY ALPHA

ALL PERSONNEL REASSIGNED TO SECTOR 7 EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY

RESEARCH MATERIALS TO BE SECURED PER PROTOCOL OMEGA-9

REMAINING SPECIMENS TO BE TERMINATED

The last line made my skin crawl. I had been a “specimen” once. I knew what “terminated” meant. My fingers tapped at the interface, scrolling through more logs. Most were mundane—supply requests, maintenance reports, personnel transfers. But one caught my eye.

PROJECT KRIDRIN ASSETS REQUIRE SPECIAL HANDLING

ALL GENETIC MATERIALS TO BE PRESERVED

VIABLE SUBJECTS IN STASIS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

Kridrin. The name sent a jolt through me. I’d heard Zehn mention them before—enemies of the Legion.

I continued searching, piecing together fragments of information. The Engineers had been studying Kridrin technology, perhaps even their genetic code. Had they been trying to resurrect their old allies? Or weaponize their remains? Either way, it couldn’t be good.

A final log entry caught my attention:

TERMINUS PROTOCOL ACTIVATED

FACILITY LOCKDOWN INITIATED

ALL PERSONNEL EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY

MAY THE GODS HAVE MERCY ON US ALL

The date stamp was nearly five years ago. Whatever had happened here, it had been bad enough to warrant complete abandonment. And yet, the systems were still online,

still waiting...

I stepped back from the terminal, deciding I'd seen enough.

This place made my fur stand on end. We'd camp for the night as planned, but I'd convince Zehn to give this facility a wide berth when we continued our journey tomorrow.

Everly didn't need to be anywhere near whatever dark secrets this place held.

As I turned to leave, my boot caught on something—a small, cylindrical device partially hidden beneath a fallen ceiling panel.

I crouched to examine it, careful not to touch it directly.

It appeared to be some kind of scanner, its lens pointed upward.

Before I could back away, the device hummed to life, a beam of light shooting out to wash over me.

“Genetic signature detected,” a mechanical voice announced. “Subject classification: Kridrin hybrid experiment KOR-7.”

My blood ran cold. KOR-7. Khaaz Orenn Rakkaan. They knew what I was. What I had been.

“Initiating security protocol,” the voice continued. “Unauthorized Kridrin genetic material detected. Terminus countdown initiated.”

Lights flared to life throughout the facility. Alarms began to wail. A different voice—deeper, more resonant—began a countdown from sixty minutes. I cursed,

lunging for the terminal, fingers flying across the interface as I tried to abort whatever I'd just triggered.

ACCESS DENIED

TERMINUS PROTOCOL CANNOT BE ABORTED

COMPLETE FACILITY DESTRUCTION WILL COMMENCE IN 59:45

The message flashed red, mocking me. I slammed my fist against the screen, cracking it. "No, no, no!"

I had to get back to Zehn and Everly. We needed to get as far from here as possible. Whatever "terminus protocol" meant, it couldn't be good. I turned and sprinted back the way I'd come, no longer bothering with stealth.

As I neared the exit, a security barrier slammed down, blocking my path.

I skidded to a halt, searching frantically for another way out.

A ventilation shaft above caught my eye.

I leaped, claws digging into the wall as I climbed, then tore the grate free and squeezed my larger frame through the opening.

The shaft was tight, but I forced my way through, following the scent of fresh air. After what felt like an eternity of crawling through dust and cobwebs, I spotted light ahead. With one powerful kick, I knocked out another grate and tumbled to the ground outside.

I scrambled to my feet and ran toward our camp, heart pounding. The facility behind

me continued to pulse with light, the alarm audible even at this distance. As I burst into the clearing where we'd set up, I found Zehn and Everly already alert, weapons ready.

"Khaaz!" Everly's voice was a balm even in this moment of crisis. Her scent reached me—that intoxicating blend of spice and sweetness that had called to me since our first unity dream. My mate. Mine to protect.

"We need to move," I gasped out. "Now. The facility—I triggered something. A countdown."

Zehn's eyes narrowed, his larger form tensing. "What kind of countdown?"

"Terminus protocol. Complete facility destruction in less than an hour. We need to get as far from here as possible."

"How?" Everly asked, already gathering her pack. "What did you do?"

"It scanned me," I explained, my words tumbling out in a rush. "It recognized my genetic signature. Called me a Kridrin hybrid experiment."

At the word "Kridrin," Zehn's expression darkened. "The Kridrin have been defeated years ago."

"Not their DNA apparently," I growled. "The Engineers were studying it. Maybe using it." I didn't add that they'd used it on me. That much was obvious from my designation as KOR-7.

"We need to see what we're dealing with," Zehn said, shouldering his pack. "If it's going to destroy the facility, it might take out a much larger area. We need to know the blast radius."

I bared my teeth at him. “No. We need to get Everly to safety. That’s what matters.”

“I agree with Zehn,” Everly said, her dark eyes meeting mine without fear. She never showed fear around me, even when I knew my appearance—my scars, my feral nature—unsettled others. “We need more information.”

I wanted to argue, to throw her over my shoulder and carry her far from this place, but I knew that look. She was stubborn, our mate. It was one of the things I loved about her, even when it drove me to distraction.

“Fine,” I growled. “But you stay behind us.”

We moved quickly through the forest, following my trail back to the facility. The alarms were louder now, and a new sound had joined them—the low hum of machinery powering up. Whatever was about to happen, it was gaining momentum.

“There’s an entrance this way,” I said, leading them toward a different side of the building than where I’d exited. “Less secure.”

As we approached, Zehn suddenly pulled up short, his nostrils flaring. “Wait. I smell explosives. Proximity charges.”

I sniffed the air, catching what he had—the faint chemical tang of detonation compounds. “They weren’t active before.”

“The terminus protocol must have armed them,” Zehn said. “This place is rigged to blow from the inside out.”

Everly pushed between us, her smaller human form dwarfed by our Rodinian bulk. “Let me see the main control panel. If it’s an Engineer facility, I might be able to hack it.”

“No,” I said immediately, blocking her path. “Too dangerous.”

“He’s right,” Zehn agreed. “We should fall back, get to minimum safe distance.”

“And what is that distance exactly?” Everly challenged.

“Do either of you know what kind of yield we’re talking about?

Because I’m guessing from the size of this facility and the term ‘terminus protocol’ that we’re looking at complete molecular dissolution for at least a ten-mile radius. Possibly more.”

The implications hit me like a physical blow. Ten miles. Our transport was parked eight miles from here. Even if we ran at top speed, we’d never make it in time.

“I can stop it,” Everly insisted. “Computer systems is what I do. Their failsafes always have backdoors. Let me try.”

“It’s too risky,” I growled, my protective instincts in overdrive. “We’ll find another way.”

“There is no other way!” Everly’s voice rose. “We’re out of options.”

Zehn stepped between us, his expression grim. “Khaaz, she’s right. And you know it.”

I wanted to tear into him for siding against me, for putting our mate in danger. But the logic of it was inescapable. If we ran, we’d die anyway. If Everly tried and failed, at least we’d die together. But if she succeeded...

“If you’re going in there, so am I,” I said, my tone leaving no room for argument.

“We all go,” Zehn agreed. “Together.”

We approached the facility again, this time with Everly guiding us around the proximity sensors she somehow knew how to detect. The main entrance was sealed, but Zehn and I together managed to force the doors open enough for us to slip through.

Inside, the countdown echoed ominously through the corridors. “Terminus protocol will execute in thirty-five minutes.”

We followed Everly as she navigated the facility with surprising confidence, heading for what she called the central command hub. I stayed close behind her, every sense alert for danger. Zehn brought up the rear, watching our backs.

The command hub was a large circular room dominated by a central console. Displays lined the walls, each showing different aspects of the terminus protocol in progress. Power building. Detonation charges arming. Containment fields preparing to collapse.

Everly went straight to the main console and began working, her fingers flying over the interface. “This tech feels familiar. It’s like the command centers I use at work.”

“Can you stop it?” I asked, watching the countdown timer on the main display. Thirty-one minutes now.

“Maybe. There’s layers of encryption, but there’s always a—” She broke off, eyes widening as a new message appeared on the screen.

GENETIC VERIFICATION REQUIRED

KRIDRIN AUTHORIZATION NEEDED TO ABORT TERMINUS PROTOCOL

“It needs Kridrin DNA to abort,” she said, looking up at me. “Your DNA.”

As if that weren't frustrating enough, another alarm layered itself to the countdown sequence, along with the unmistakable whine of a pulse rifle warming up.

Zehn's head whipped around toward the entrance. “Sentinel drones?” He didn't wait for the answer as his body shifted into his battle form.

I followed suit. “Sentinel drones.”

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The countdown on the screen flashed red, each descending number pulsing like a heartbeat about to stop. Sixty seconds. Fifty-nine. Fifty-eight. I gripped the edge of the console, my fingertips white against the metallic surface.

Outside, the sounds of Zehn and Khaaz fighting the sentinel drones echoed through the facility's walls. The rattle of weapons fire. The screech of metal. Their roars as they kept the perimeter safe while I tried to stop us all from being atomized.

"Come on, Everly. Think," I muttered to myself, fingers flying across the alien keyboard that somehow responded to my touch. It wasn't the first time I'd worked under pressure, but it was definitely the first time the pressure involved an actual bomb.

A particularly loud explosion shook the walls. My heart clenched at the thought of Zehn and Khaaz out there, their massive forms twisting and leaping as they battled mechanical sentinels. I'd insisted that I could do this, and dammit, I hated being wrong.

Forty-five seconds.

The screen before me filled with lines of code, cascading data, and security protocols.

My mind flashed back to the countless hours I'd spent debugging critical systems at my job.

The way my supervisors would pace behind me, muttering about deadlines and security breaches while I tuned them out, focusing only on the patterns in the code.

These patterns were different, but not entirely unfamiliar. The syntax had similarities to old legacy systems I'd worked with during government contracts. Systems so old they predated modern computing frameworks. Systems built on systems built on systems.

"That's it," I whispered, fingers moving faster. "This isn't completely alien technology."

Thirty seconds.

A metallic ping ricocheted off the reinforced door—a sound I now recognized as drone ammunition.

I heard Khaaz's fierce growl in response, the protective fury in it making my skin flush despite the danger.

That skittish, gentle giant who still shied away from looking me directly in the eyes turned into something primal and deadly when it came to keeping me safe.

I focused back on the screen, scanning the symbols and algorithms. Certain command structures looked eerily similar to those I'd seen in my work—too similar to be coincidence. I pulled up another screen, this one containing what appeared to be research files.

Twenty seconds.

"Project Kridrin," I read aloud, my eyes widening as images flashed across the screen. Humanoid figures, anatomical diagrams, genetic sequences.

"Holy shit."

The realization hit me with the force of a physical blow.

The Kridrin weren't just aliens. They were humans—or at least, they had been.

Humans from another dimension, another version of space-time.

Humans who had evolved differently, adapted differently.

The file mentioned “dimensional divergence approximately 100,000 years ago.”

Which explained why the facility was responding to me at all. Why the keyboard accepted my touch. Why I could read some of the code.

Fifteen seconds.

A deep boom rattled the entire facility.

Through the security feed in the corner of my screen, I caught a glimpse of Zehn in his Beast Battle form, a nine-foot nightmare of muscle and fury, tearing a sentinel drone in half with his bare hands.

Even through the grainy footage, I could see the fierce determination in his eyes.

He'd promised to protect me, and he was keeping that promise with every fiber of his massive being.

Ten seconds.

My attention snapped back to the countdown. I had to stop it, but how? If the Kridrin were humans from another timeline, then maybe...

“DNA authentication,” I murmured, spotting a small panel beside the main console. It looked almost like a fingerprint scanner, but larger. Without hesitating, I pressed my palm against it.

The panel glowed blue beneath my hand, a tingling sensation spreading up my arm as it scanned me. For a terrifying moment, nothing happened.

Five seconds.

Four.

Three.

The countdown froze. The red numbers blinked once, twice, then shifted to green.

“DNA sequence recognized. Welcome back, Administrator,” a mechanized voice announced, the gender-neutral tone echoing around the chamber. “Facility defense protocols disengaged.”

I sagged against the console, relief making my knees weak. “Administrator? What the hell?”

The screens before me shifted, displaying new information. Project files. Research data. And my own DNA sequence, spinning in a double helix beside a comparative analysis with something labeled “Kridrin Prime Sample.”

The match wasn’t perfect—not even close—but there were enough similarities that the ancient system had accepted me as one of its masters. Somewhere in my genetic code, I carried markers that this facility recognized as authorized. As if my ancestors had been here before. Or built this place.

My mind reeled with the implications. If the Kridrin were humans from another timeline, and this facility recognized my DNA, then what did that mean about Earth's history? About my own lineage?

Outside, I could still hear the sounds of battle. The drones hadn't stopped their attack.

"Computer," I called out, hoping the voice recognition would work as well as the DNA scanner had. "Identify active security measures."

"Perimeter defense systems active. Nineteen sentinel units currently engaged."

Nineteen? And my two leopard men were holding them off? A rush of pride mingled with fear.

"Deactivate all sentinel units," I commanded. "Authorization..." I hesitated, then took a chance. "Authorization: Everly Flores."

For a moment, there was silence.

"Voiceprint insufficient," the computer responded. "Secondary authentication required."

Damn it. I glanced at the DNA panel, which still glowed with my handprint. "Use DNA authentication as secondary."

The panel pulsed brighter. "Processing... Authentication accepted. Deactivating sentinel units."

Through the security feed, I watched as the drones froze mid-action.

One had been leaping toward Khaaz, its metal claws extended.

Another had been firing at Zehn, who was using the remnants of a previous drone as a shield.

They all simply powered down, slumping to the ground or hovering in place before their propulsion systems disengaged, sending them crashing to the floor.

The sudden silence was almost as shocking as the previous battle sounds had been.

I exhaled slowly, running shaking hands through my hair. My black strands were damp with sweat, and I realized my whole body was trembling with adrenaline.

“Computer, what is Project Kridrin?” I asked, turning back to the main console.

“Project Kridrin: Interdimensional Genetics Research Initiative,” the computer responded. “Established to study genetic divergence across dimensional boundaries.”

“And who am I? I mean, why did my DNA work to stop the countdown?”

“DNA analysis indicates subject is descendant of research team beta-six. Access level: Administrator.”

Research team? So my ancestors had been scientists here? The entire concept seemed impossible, and yet... here I was, standing in an alien facility that responded to my touch, my voice, my very genetic code.

“When was this facility last active?” I asked.

“Last active user login: 3,724 local cycles ago.”

However long a “local cycle” was, it had clearly been a very long time. Perhaps this place had been abandoned when Earth’s societies had collapsed during some

prehistoric calamity, only to rise again with no memory of what had come before. The thought was dizzying.

The reinforced door slid open with a pneumatic hiss. I spun around, instinctively backing up against the console, before recognizing the massive figures that filled the doorway.

Zehn entered first, his Beast Battle form gradually shifting back to his still-impressive seven-foot height.

Golden eyes scanned the room for threats before settling on me with an intensity that made my stomach flip.

Behind him, Khaaz moved more cautiously, his scarred body tense as he assessed the situation.

“Everly,” Zehn rumbled, his deep voice washing over me like a physical caress. “The machines stopped. Did you...?”

“Yeah,” I said, my voice cracking slightly. I cleared my throat. “I stopped them. And the bomb, too.”

Khaaz remained near the doorway, his skittish nature reasserting itself now that the immediate danger had passed. But his eyes never left me, filled with a mixture of awe and something deeper I wasn’t ready to name.

“How?” Zehn asked, stepping closer. His massive form moved with a predatory grace that belied his size, and despite the danger we’d just escaped, I found my body responding to his proximity in ways that were becoming familiar but no less overwhelming.

“It’s... complicated,” I said, gesturing to the screens behind me. “But it turns out I’m kind of related to the people who built this place. Or at least, the system thinks I am.”

Zehn’s eyes narrowed, his head tilting in a way that reminded me of a curious cat. “Related how?”

“The Kridrin,” I explained, watching both males stiffen at the word.

“They weren’t just aliens. They were humans—or what humans became in another dimension.

According to these files, there was some kind of dimensional split about a hundred thousand years ago.

Different evolution, different adaptations, but the same base species. ”

Khaaz made a soft sound, something between surprise and recognition. It was the most I’d heard from him in a non-battle situation.

I turned back to the console, bringing up more files.

“It looks like this facility was researching dimensional genetics. Trying to understand how humans evolved differently across different timelines. My DNA is similar enough to the research team’s that the system recognized me as an administrator. ”

Zehn moved closer, the heat of his body radiating against my back. “So you commanded the machines to stop.”

“I did,” I confirmed, still somewhat amazed by it myself.

His large hand settled on my shoulder, gentle despite its size. “My clever mate,” he

murmured, the pride in his voice sending a warm shiver down my spine.

From the doorway, Khaaz watched us with those intense eyes, his scarred face unreadable. But I could see the tension in his powerful frame, the way his claws flexed at his sides. He wanted to approach but held himself back.

I made a decision then, extending my hand toward him. “We should look through these files. Both of you. There might be information about the Rodinians too.”

Khaaz hesitated, glancing at Zehn as if seeking permission. Something unspoken passed between the two males before Khaaz stepped forward, moving cautiously to my other side.

“I knew you were special from the first moment I scented you,” Zehn said, his voice a low rumble that seemed to vibrate through my entire body. “But even I did not imagine this.”

I looked between the two massive leopard men—one confident and commanding, the other scarred and skittish but no less deadly—and felt a strange sense of belonging I’d never experienced before.

Whatever mysteries this facility held, whatever answers it might provide about my own heritage and the connection between humans and Kridrin, I knew one thing for certain: I wasn’t facing it alone.

“Let’s find out what else this place can tell us,” I said, turning back to the console with renewed determination. The screens glowed with ancient knowledge, waiting to be unlocked.

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I kept to the shadows of the doorway, every muscle in my scarred body still humming with battle-readiness despite the sentinel drones' deactivation.

The scent of ozone and hot metal hung in the air, mingling with Everly's sweet human fragrance that somehow cut through everything else.

My eyes never left her as she stood before the ancient console, her small fingers dancing across technology that should have been incomprehensible to her.

Yet she commanded it like she'd been born to it.

Perhaps, in some strange way across dimensions and time, she had been.

"We need to secure the perimeter," Zehn said, his golden eyes scanning the hallway behind us. "There might be more sentinel units the system hasn't deactivated."

I nodded, reluctant to leave Everly but knowing he was right. The protective instinct that had driven me to tear through metal with my bare hands still pulsed beneath my skin. "I'll take the east wing," I offered, my voice rough from disuse and battle roars.

Everly turned from the console, her dark eyes finding mine with an intensity that made my heart stutter in my chest. "Be careful," she said. "I've disabled the main systems, but there might be autonomous units operating on independent power sources."

The concern in her voice for me—scarred, damaged, hybridized me—sent an unfamiliar warmth spreading through my chest. I dipped my head in

acknowledgment, not trusting myself to speak again.

“We’ll regroup here in thirty minutes,” Zehn directed, already moving toward the west corridor with the fluid grace of a natural predator. Despite our differences, I respected his tactical mind. He’d survived countless battles as a Legion Reaper—it showed in every calculated movement.

I moved through the eastern corridors with careful precision, my heightened senses alert for any mechanical sounds or movement.

The facility was vast, its architecture both alien and strangely familiar.

Smooth metallic surfaces gave way to organic curves, as if the building itself had grown rather than been constructed.

Overhead lighting flickered intermittently, casting long shadows that danced across the walls.

Each room I checked revealed more mysteries. Laboratories filled with equipment I couldn’t name. Chambers with suspended animation pods, long emptied of whatever had once occupied them. Storage units containing materials that seemed to shift and change when viewed from different angles.

In one chamber, I discovered three sentinel drones, their mechanical limbs frozen mid-movement like morbid sculptures.

They hadn’t been deactivated with the others.

Their optical sensors still glowed with a faint red light, tracking my movement as I entered the room.

Trapped in place by whatever command Everly had given, but still aware. Still watching.

I approached cautiously, claws extended.

These machines had tried to kill us—tried to kill Everly.

My lips pulled back in a silent snarl at the thought.

With precise movements, I located the power source on the first drone and disabled it permanently, plunging my claws into the core mechanism.

The red light in its sensors faded to black.

I repeated the process with the other two, satisfaction rumbling in my chest as each one powered down.

“Khaaz,” Zehn’s voice came through the communicator Everly had found for us in the facility’s supplies. “Status report.”

“Three sentinels neutralized,” I replied, my voice low. “Otherwise clear so far.”

“Same here. Two non-functional units found but no active threats. Meet back at central command.”

I made my way back through the corridors, my steps lighter knowing that Everly would be safer now.

The scent of her grew stronger as I approached the central room, pulling me forward like an invisible tether.

When I entered, she was leaning over the console, her dark hair falling forward to frame her face as she studied the screen with intense concentration.

Zehn stood nearby, his massive form positioned protectively between her and the door.

His ears twitched as I entered, acknowledging my presence without taking his eyes off Everly.

It was a dance we'd fallen into—both of us orbiting her like twin moons around a planet, pulled by forces we couldn't resist.

"Find anything interesting?" I asked, keeping my distance despite wanting to move closer.

Everly looked up, her face lighting with excitement. "So much. This facility wasn't just a research station—it was a dimensional waypoint. A place where the Kridrin could monitor and interact with multiple realities."

I moved closer, curiosity overcoming my habitual caution. "How is that possible?"

"According to these records, the Kridrin mastered dimensional travel years ago. They discovered that certain points in space-time were naturally thin—places where the barriers between dimensions could be crossed more easily." Her fingers traced patterns on the screen, pulling up images and text that shifted and changed as she touched them.

"This facility sits on one of those points."

"There's more," Everly continued, her excitement making her words tumble out faster. "The archives mention that the Kridrin gave Legion Command problems about

five years ago. Something about infiltrating a Legion colony vessel?”

Zehn’s ears perked up. “I remember that. I was patrolling the outer reaches near void space when there was a distress beacon and all Reaper units were called in briefly. The action ended before I got there.” He scrolled through his interface to pull up data.

“Yes, here it is. A previously unknown species appeared with technology that outmatched anything in the Legion’s arsenal. They nearly overtook Legion command.”

“You fought them?” Everly asked.

“No,” Zehn shook his head. “But it seemed like a hell of a battle. A few Legion Reapers collapsed their wormhole, keeping them in void space for good.”

“Five years ago,” I wondered. “That could have been when the engineers retreated as well. Do they still have working comms? Surely there’s a way for them to communicate?”

“Possibly,” Everly said, turning back to the console. “If this facility was a waypoint, it might have communication capabilities. Let me see...”

As she worked, I moved around the room, checking the remaining sentinel drones we’d dragged inside.

They lay in broken heaps, their mechanical limbs twisted at unnatural angles.

I began methodically stripping them for parts that might be useful—power cells, weapons components, metal plating that could be repurposed.

“You’re thinking of staying here,” Zehn observed, coming to stand beside me.

It wasn't a question, but I answered anyway. "It's defensible. Remote. The technology is operational." I glanced toward Everly. "And she can control it."

Zehn nodded slowly. "A good shelter until we decide our next move. But we'll need supplies."

"Everything we need is here," I said. "This facility was meant to be self-sufficient. There were rations and supplies readily available."

"Found it!" Everly called out, drawing our attention back to the console. "The communication array is operational, but it's limited to specific frequencies. It looks like it was designed to contact other Kridrin outposts."

"Can it be modified?" Zehn asked, moving toward her.

"I think so," she replied, her fingers already working at the controls. "The basic principles are similar to systems I've worked with before. If I can recalibrate the quantum resonance pattern..."

Her technical explanation continued, filled with terms I didn't understand.

But I understood the determination in her voice, the fierce intelligence that had already saved us multiple times.

As I watched her work, the realization hit me with unexpected force: our mission was over.

We had escaped capture. We had found shelter. The immediate danger had passed.

So what was my purpose now?

For years, I had existed solely to survive—first as a test subject, then as a weapon.

Every decision, every action had been driven by the immediate need to stay alive and free.

Now, standing in this abandoned facility with no pursuers at our heels and no clear objective ahead, I felt unmoored. Adrift.

The sensation was so unfamiliar that at first I mistook it for physical pain. I moved away from Zehn and Everly, retreating to the far side of the room where the shadows were deeper. My claws extended and retracted unconsciously, scoring faint lines in the metal wall behind me.

What was I without a mission? Without an enemy to fight or a threat to evade?

The genetic tampering that had created me had designed me for combat, for survival in hostile environments.

Not for... this. Not for peace. Not for the strange domesticity that seemed to be developing between the three of us.

And certainly not for the feelings that stirred whenever Everly looked at me with those dark, knowing eyes.

“Khaaz?” Her voice pulled me from my thoughts. She had moved from the console and now stood before me, close enough that I could feel the heat radiating from her small human form. “What’s wrong?”

I looked away, unable to meet her gaze. “Nothing.”

“Bullshit,” she said, the harshness of the word contrasting with the softness of her

voice. “You’ve been brooding in this corner for ten minutes. Talk to me.”

I risked a glance at her face and found no fear there, no disgust at my scarred appearance. Only concern and something else—something warmer that made my chest tighten.

“I don’t know what happens now,” I admitted, the words feeling raw in my throat. “The mission is complete. We’re safe. I don’t...” I struggled to articulate the emptiness I felt. “I don’t know my purpose anymore.”

Everly’s expression shifted, a flash of understanding followed by something fiercer. “Your purpose? Is that all you think you are? A weapon with a mission?”

Her words hit with unexpected force. I’d never considered myself as anything else.

“You need to get over yourself,” she continued, stepping even closer. “You’re not just some experiment, some tool to be used and discarded. You’re a person, Khaaz. A person with choices and desires and a future that’s yours to decide.”

I stared at her, stunned by the passion in her voice. “I don’t know how to be that,” I confessed, the admission costing me more than I’d expected.

“Neither do I,” she said, her voice softening. “I spent years letting my job define me, working myself to exhaustion because I didn’t know who I was without it. But when everything fell apart, I discovered there was still a person underneath all that. You will too.”

Before I could respond, she rose on her tiptoes and pressed her lips to mine.

The kiss was gentle, brief, but it sent a shock wave through my entire body.

Her scent enveloped me, her warmth seeped into my skin, and for one breathless moment, everything else fell away—my past, my fears, my uncertainty.

When she pulled back, her cheeks were flushed but her eyes were steady. “That’s a start,” she murmured. “Figure out what you want, Khaaz. Not what you were made for. What you want.”

As she turned and walked back to the console where Zehn waited, his expression unreadable, I raised my fingers to my lips, still feeling the phantom pressure of her kiss. For the first time in my existence, I allowed myself to consider her words.

What did I want?

The answer came with surprising clarity: I wanted this. This shelter we were creating. This strange companionship with Zehn that balanced between rivalry and respect. And most of all, I wanted Everly—not just to protect, but to be with. To learn from. To become more than what I had been made to be.

It wasn’t a mission or a purpose in the way I was accustomed to. It was something both simpler and infinitely more complex.

It was a beginning.

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The console hummed beneath my fingers as I recalibrated the communication array, my mind fully absorbed in the intricate dance of alien technology that somehow recognized my touch.

Hours had passed since I'd disabled the facility's defenses, yet adrenaline still coursed through my veins, keeping me sharp, focused.

This place—this impossible facility built by human-adjacent beings from another dimension—was becoming our sanctuary.

And if I was going to make it truly safe, we needed a way to communicate with potential allies without broadcasting our location to every Legion patrol in the sector.

“Just a few more adjustments,” I muttered, more to myself than to Zehn, who stood nearby with arms crossed, his golden eyes tracking my every movement. Khaaz had gone to scout the perimeter again, his restless energy needing an outlet after our earlier conversation.

The communication array was sophisticated but oddly familiar, like finding a different dialect of a language you already speak.

I input the frequency from Zehn's prowler, then layered in encryption algorithms based on the Kridrin protocols I'd discovered in the facility's database.

The system accepted my commands with an ease that still unnerved me.

“There,” I said finally, leaning back from the console. “I've set up an automatic relay

that will only accept communications on your prowler's frequency. Anything else gets blocked before it even reaches our systems."

"Will it alert us if someone tries?" Zehn asked, practical as always.

"Better than that." I couldn't help the pride that crept into my voice. "It'll feed them false coordinates—a decoy signal about two hundred kilometers southeast, near that abandoned mining complex we passed on our approach."

Zehn's lips curved in a rare smile. "Clever."

"I have my moments," I replied, stretching my arms above my head to release the tension in my shoulders.

My body ached from hours of standing hunched over the console, not to mention the earlier adrenaline rush of disabling the bomb and fighting off sentinel drones.

"Is there any chance this place has functional plumbing? I would literally kill for a shower right now."

"East wing, third door on the right," Zehn said. "Khaaz found living quarters there during his patrol. The facility's life support systems are still operational."

I raised an eyebrow. "You were going to tell me this when?"

"When you finished securing our communications," he responded smoothly. "Priorities."

I rolled my eyes but couldn't argue with his logic. "Fair enough. I'm going to check it out. Keep an eye on the relay—it'll ping if it makes contact with any of the frequencies we've programmed in."

The hallways of the facility had stopped feeling quite so alien as I made my way to the east wing. Lights activated automatically as I approached, a soft blue-white glow that illuminated the smooth, curved walls. Despite its original purpose, the place felt almost welcoming.

The living quarters Zehn had mentioned turned out to be a small suite of rooms—sparse but functional, with what looked like sleeping platforms, storage units, and a circular doorway that led to the bathroom facilities.

My heart leapt at the sight of what was unmistakably a shower, albeit one designed for beings slightly taller than the average human.

I stripped off my grimy clothes with a sigh of relief, letting them fall to the floor in a dirty heap. The control panel for the shower responded to my touch just like the main console had, and after a moment of experimentation, I managed to activate a spray of warm water from multiple directions.

The sensation was heavenly. I closed my eyes and let the water cascade over me, washing away days of sweat, dirt, and fear.

For a few blissful minutes, I could almost pretend I was back home on Earth, in my apartment's cramped shower after a long day at work.

Not stranded in an alien facility with two massive leopard men who apparently considered me their mate.

Their mate. The thought sent a shiver through me that had nothing to do with the water temperature.

My mind flashed back to Khaaz's stunned expression when I'd kissed him, to the heat in Zehn's eyes whenever I caught him watching me.

The unity dreams we'd shared had been intense, but the reality of being with them—actually with them—was something I'd barely allowed myself to contemplate.

By the time I emerged from the shower, my skin flushed and my hair dripping wet, twilight had fallen outside the facility's few windows.

I found clean clothing in one of the storage units—simple garments that seemed designed for human proportions, further evidence of the Kridrin's connection to humanity.

The fabric was soft against my skin, almost silky, and I wondered what material it was made from as I made my way back to the main chamber.

The scent hit me first—something rich and savory that made my stomach growl in response.

I followed my nose to a small adjoining room where Zehn and Khaaz had set up what looked like a makeshift dining area.

A portable heating unit held some kind of stew, and neatly arranged on a flat surface were various fruits and what appeared to be bread.

"You cooked?" I asked, unable to keep the surprise from my voice.

Khaaz looked up from where he was slicing something purple and fruit-like into thin sections. His scarred face remained impassive, but there was a gentleness in his movements that hadn't been there earlier.

"We hunted and prepared food for ourselves long before Legion rations," Zehn explained, setting down three simple bowls. "The facility's stores had preserved supplies, and Khaaz found edible plants nearby."

“I analyzed them for compatibility with your digestive system,” Khaaz added quietly. “They’re safe.”

The thought of these two fierce warriors preparing a meal for me—for us—created a warm feeling in my chest that spread outward. Something domestic and tender amidst all the danger and uncertainty we’d faced.

We ate in companionable silence for a while, the food surprisingly good—hearty and flavorful, with the purple fruit adding a sweet-tart contrast. As my hunger eased, my mind returned to the research I’d been studying before setting up the communications relay.

“I found something interesting in the facility’s archives,” I said, setting down my bowl. “Records about Rodinian physiology and mating practices. Including their interpretation of fate-mates.”

Zehn’s hand stilled halfway to his mouth. Beside him, Khaaz went utterly motionless, not even breathing.

“The data mentioned shared dreams,” I continued, watching their reactions carefully. “Physiological responses. Bonding rituals. It was part of the Kridrin’s comparative xenobiology research.”

“Why were you looking into this?” Zehn asked, his deep voice carefully neutral.

I met his golden eyes directly. “Because I wanted to understand what’s happening between us. The unity dreams we shared weren’t just dreams, were they? They mean something specific in your culture.”

Zehn exchanged a glance with Khaaz before responding. “I didn’t want to influence your decision with our biology. Fate-mates are sacred to Rodinians, but the bond

must be freely chosen.”

“You thought I’d feel compelled to accept if I knew?” I asked.

“Or frightened away,” Zehn said softly, surprising me. “The bond is intense. Permanent.”

I considered this, turning my empty cup between my hands. “You wanted me to choose based on my feelings, not some biological imperative or cultural obligation.”

“Yes,” Zehn confirmed.

“I did choose,” I said, my voice steady despite the nervous flutter in my stomach. “Before I knew any of this. I chose when I stayed with you after the crash. When I fought beside you against the sentinels. When I kissed Khaaz earlier today.”

Khaaz’s eyes widened slightly at my directness.

“What I want to know now,” I continued, “is what comes next. The archives mentioned claiming, bonding. I want to understand what that means. I want you to show me.”

Zehn’s expression intensified, his pupils dilating until his eyes were mostly black with just a rim of gold. “Everly, are you certain?”

“I’ve never been more certain of anything,” I replied, holding his gaze. “My old life is gone. Everything I thought I knew about the universe has been turned upside down. But this—what I feel for both of you—that feels real. That feels right.”

I noticed Khaaz shifting subtly, his body angling away as if preparing to leave. Without hesitation, I reached out and caught his wrist, feeling the corded muscle

beneath my fingers.

“Both of you,” I emphasized, holding his eyes now. “I want both of you. Together.”

Khaaz froze, his expression a complex mixture of disbelief, hope, and longing so intense it made my chest ache.

I gave him a small smile. “The research mentioned dual-bonding was rare but possible. Unless you two aren’t comfortable sharing?”

The two males exchanged another look, something unspoken passing between them. As if there had already been an agreement.

Zehn’s lips curved into a smile that sent heat racing through my body. He looked to Khaaz, who gave a slight nod, his scarred face finally relaxing into something like acceptance.

“Done,” Zehn said simply, and the single word carried the weight of a vow.

We moved to the communications room where they’d created a makeshift sleeping area from cushions and bedding found throughout the facility.

The soft blue lighting dimmed automatically as we entered, casting everything in a gentle glow that softened the harsh lines of the alien technology surrounding us.

My heart hammered in my chest, a mixture of nerves and desire making my skin hypersensitive.

When Zehn’s massive hand cupped my cheek, I leaned into his touch, my body already responding to the heat of his palm against my skin.

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“We will go at your pace,” he rumbled, his golden eyes holding mine. “Tell us if anything becomes too much.”

I nodded, my throat suddenly dry. Behind me, I felt Khaaz’s presence—more hesitant than Zehn’s but no less intense. His scarred hands hovered near my shoulders, not quite touching until I reached back and guided them to my waist.

“Don’t hold back,” I whispered. “Either of you.”

Something primal flashed in Zehn’s eyes.

He lowered his head, capturing my mouth in a kiss that stole my breath.

Unlike our unity dreams, which had a dreamlike quality despite their intensity, this was devastatingly real—the slight roughness of his lips, the heat of his tongue as it explored my mouth, the rumbling purr that vibrated through his chest and into mine.

While Zehn claimed my mouth, Khaaz’s hands grew bolder, sliding beneath the thin garment I wore to caress the bare skin of my stomach.

His touch was reverent, almost hesitant at first, then more confident as I pressed back against him.

I gasped into Zehn’s mouth as Khaaz’s fingers skimmed the underside of my breasts.

They worked in tandem, as if they’d planned this—Zehn breaking our kiss to pull the covering over my head while Khaaz’s hands steadied me from behind.

Cool air kissed my naked skin, followed immediately by the heat of their gazes.

I should have felt exposed, vulnerable between these two massive predators. Instead, I felt powerful, desired.

“Beautiful,” Khaaz murmured, the word so soft I almost didn’t hear it.

I turned in his arms, raising up on tiptoes to kiss him. Where Zehn was commanding, Khaaz was tentative, letting me lead until I nipped at his lower lip. Something snapped in him then —his arms tightened around me, lifting me effortlessly as he deepened the kiss with a hunger that made me dizzy.

Zehn moved behind me, his hands replacing Khaaz’s on my waist as he pressed against my back.

I was sandwiched between them, surrounded by their heat, their scent, their strength.

They lowered me to the makeshift bed, and I watched through half-lidded eyes as they shed their clothing—revealing powerful bodies covered in the short, sleek fur that reminded me of a leopard’s coat, muscles rippling beneath.

“Let us taste you first,” Zehn said, his voice deeper than I’d ever heard it. “Let us learn you all over again outside of dreams.”

I nodded, unable to form words as they positioned themselves on either side of me. Zehn began at my neck, his tongue tracing patterns that made me shiver while his hands explored my breasts. Khaaz started lower, his broad palms sliding up my thighs, parting them gently.

The first touch of Khaaz’s tongue against my core made me cry out.

He was methodical, exploring every fold with thorough attention, learning what made me gasp and what made me moan.

Zehn's mouth traveled lower, capturing a nipple between his lips, the gentle scrape of his teeth sending sparks of pleasure down my spine.

"Oh god," I gasped as Khaaz found my clit, circling it with the tip of his tongue before sucking gently. My hips bucked involuntarily, but his strong hands held me in place.

Zehn chuckled against my breast, the vibration adding another layer of sensation. "Let go, Everly. Give him your first taste."

As if his permission was all I needed, my body tensed, then shattered. The orgasm washed over me in waves, Khaaz's steady rhythm drawing it out until I was trembling, oversensitive.

They switched places then, Zehn settling between my thighs while Khaaz moved up to claim my mouth.

I tasted myself on his lips, a primal intimacy that made my heart race.

Zehn's approach was different—more aggressive, his tongue delving deep before flattening against my still-sensitive clit.

Where Khaaz had been methodical, Zehn was demanding, driving me toward another peak with relentless precision.

"The dreams," I gasped against Khaaz's lips as another orgasm built. "This is so much more?—"

“Yes,” Khaaz agreed, his voice rough with desire. “Reality is always more intense than unity dreams.”

Zehn hummed his agreement, the vibration sending me over the edge again. My back arched off the bed, a cry torn from my throat as pleasure crashed through me. This time, I felt an echo of something else—a flicker of their pleasure mingling with mine, as if a channel was opening between us.

“You feel it,” Zehn said, rising up to look at me with wonder. “The bond is beginning to form.”

I nodded, dazed by the dual sensations. “I can feel what you feel. Just... glimpses.”

“It will grow stronger,” Khaaz promised, his hand trailing down my stomach. “With each touch. Each claim.”

They took turns after that, driving me to heights I’d never imagined possible. Zehn’s fingers inside me while Khaaz suckled at my breasts. Khaaz’s mouth between my legs while Zehn kissed me deeply. I lost count of my orgasms, each one blending into the next until I floated in a haze of pleasure.

Through it all, that strange connection grew stronger. I felt their satisfaction at my pleasure, their pride when they discovered something that made me cry out. And beneath it all, a possessive hunger that should have frightened me but instead made me feel cherished, protected.

“I want to be inside you,” Zehn growled finally, his impressive cock jutting proudly from his body. “I want to claim you properly.”

“Yes,” I whispered, reaching for him. “Please.”

He positioned himself between my thighs, the broad head of his cock pressing against my entrance. Despite his size, I was so wet, so ready that he slid in with surprising ease. The stretch was delicious, a fullness that made me moan as he seated himself fully.

“Mine,” he growled, beginning to move with long, powerful strokes that hit places inside me I didn’t know existed. “Ours.”

Khaaz knelt beside us, his hand finding mine, our fingers intertwining as Zehn’s pace increased. The dual sensations—Zehn inside me, Khaaz’s supportive presence—pushed me toward another peak.

“When you come,” Zehn said, his voice strained with the effort of control, “I will bite you. The claiming mark. Do you accept?”

“Yes,” I gasped, the significance of what was happening adding another layer to my pleasure. “Yes, I accept.”

His thrusts grew harder, more demanding, driving me inexorably toward climax.

When it hit, it was like nothing I’d experienced before—a white-hot explosion that seemed to start at my core and radiate outward.

At the height of it, Zehn lowered his head and bit the juncture where my neck met my shoulder.

The sharp pain blended with pleasure in a way I couldn’t have imagined, intensifying everything. I felt him pulse inside me, his release triggering aftershocks of my own. And through our growing bond, I felt his satisfaction, his joy, his fierce protectiveness.

As we caught our breath, Khaaz watched us with hunger in his eyes. Without prompting, I turned to him, reaching out.

“Your turn,” I said softly.

He hesitated only a moment before gathering me to him, positioning me above him.

I straddled his face first, as he requested with gentle hands guiding my hips.

His tongue delved deep, then broad, lapping at my oversensitive flesh.

Despite having come so many times already, I felt desire building again, a testament to their stamina and skill.

When I was trembling on the edge again, Khaaz guided me lower, positioning me over his cock.

Unlike Zehn, he wanted me on top, giving me control of the pace.

I sank down slowly, adjusting to his different shape—slightly longer than Zehn but not quite as thick.

The sensation of him filling me made us both groan.

“Move,” he urged, his hands on my hips. “Take your pleasure.”

I rocked against him, finding a rhythm that built steadily toward another climax. His hands roamed my body, cupping my breasts, thumbs brushing my nipples. Through our growing bond, I felt his wonder at being inside me, his disbelief that I had chosen him alongside Zehn.

“I want you,” I assured him, leaning down to kiss him deeply. “I choose you.”

His eyes gleamed with emotion. As my movements grew more erratic, signaling my approaching orgasm, he guided my body down, his mouth finding the swell of my breast.

“When you come,” he whispered against my skin, echoing Zehn’s words, “I will mark you. Do you accept?”

“Yes,” I gasped, rocking faster. “God, yes.”

The orgasm built more slowly this time, a deep, rolling wave rather than a sharp peak.

As it washed over me, Khaaz’s teeth sank into the soft flesh of my breast, just above my heart.

The claiming bite sent another surge of pleasure through me, and I felt him pulse inside me, his release triggering more aftershocks.

I collapsed against his chest, my body trembling with aftershocks. Zehn moved behind me, his hands gentle as they caressed my back. Through the haze of pleasure, I felt something hard pressing against me.

“One more thing will complete our bond,” Zehn murmured, his fingers finding my back entrance, circling it gently. “If you’re willing.”

I understood what he was asking. “Yes,” I whispered, my voice hoarse. “All of you. Both of you.”

He prepared me carefully, using some kind of oil to ease the way. When I was ready, he positioned himself against my back entrance while Khaaz remained inside my

core. The initial pressure was intense, almost uncomfortable, but Zehn moved with exquisite patience, giving me time to adjust.

When they were both fully seated inside me, I felt impossibly full, stretched to my limits in the most exquisite way. They began to move in tandem—Zehn withdrawing as Khaaz thrust upward, then reversing, never leaving me empty.

The dual penetration created sensations I couldn't have imagined.

Every nerve ending seemed to fire at once, pleasure building impossibly higher.

Through our strengthening bond, I felt their pleasure too—the tight heat surrounding them, the friction where their bodies nearly touched through the thin barrier separating them inside me.

“My mates,” I gasped, the word feeling right on my tongue. “Mine.”

Something snapped into place at those words—the bond crystallizing, solidifying between us. Suddenly I could feel everything they felt, their pleasure magnifying my own in an escalating feedback loop. We moved faster, harder, three bodies becoming one in purpose and pleasure.

When the final climax hit, it consumed us all simultaneously.

I screamed as white-hot pleasure crashed through me, feeling their releases pulsing deep inside, their roars of completion echoing in the small room.

The bond between us flared like a supernova, connecting us in ways that transcended the physical.

We collapsed together, a tangle of limbs and ragged breathing. As reality slowly

reasserted itself, I found myself cradled between them, Zehn's arm beneath my head, Khaaz's wrapped around my waist. Their bodies curved protectively around mine, warm and solid.

Through our new bond, I felt their contentment, their wonder, their fierce love. And I knew they could feel mine in return—the certainty that despite everything we'd been through and whatever challenges lay ahead, I was exactly where I was meant to be.

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The aftershocks of our shared climax rippled through my body like electrical currents, amplified a hundredfold by the newly formed bond between us.

I felt not only my own pleasure but theirs as well—Everly's soft trembling as she lay cradled between us, Khaaz's deep satisfaction reverberating through his scarred form.

Our scents mingled in the air, the primal musk of sex and claiming bites creating a potent cocktail that stirred my instincts even as my body recovered.

I hadn't expected this—this profound connection that transcended the physical, this bridge between our minds and souls that magnified every sensation.

Bonded fate mates spoke of the intensity of their union, but nothing had prepared me for the reality of it.

I withdrew from Everly's back entrance with careful slowness, a groan escaping my lips as oversensitive flesh slipped free.

She gasped at the sensation, and through our bond, I experienced the echo of her emptiness, the phantom feeling of my cock leaving her body.

It was disorienting and intoxicating all at once.

Khaaz remained inside her core, their bodies still joined as they lay spooned together.

His iridescent eyes met mine over Everly's shoulder, pupils still dilated with pleasure, but something new lurked in their depths—a recognition, an acceptance of this three-

way bond that defied Rodinian tradition.

I cleansed myself before returning to our makeshift bed, arranging ourselves so that Everly lay between us, her small human form dwarfed by our larger Rodinian bodies.

Her flesh was slick with sweat and our combined release, her scent marking her as ours in the most primal way possible.

The claiming marks we'd left—mine at the juncture of her neck and shoulder, Khaaz's above her heart—stood out against her skin, already healing with the accelerated speed that came from our bonding.

I traced the mark I'd left with my fingertip, feeling the raised edges where my teeth had broken her skin.

Through our bond, I sensed her pleasure at my touch, a warm contentment spreading through her limbs as she nestled between us.

From Khaaz, I felt a complex mixture of satiation and lingering hunger, his body already beginning to respond again despite our recent release.

The sensitivity of our new connection was overwhelming—I could feel the weight of Everly's breast in Khaaz's palm as if it were my own hand cupping her softness.

This bond was beyond anything I'd imagined during my years as a Legion Reaper.

Every touch, every sensation echoed between us, creating feedback loops of desire and satisfaction.

As Khaaz's thumb brushed across Everly's nipple, I felt the jolt of pleasure that shot through her core, and in turn, the tightening of her internal muscles around Khaaz's

still-embedded cock.

The sensation of her squeezing him transferred to me, making my own cock twitch and begin to harden again despite having just spent myself.

I growled low in my throat, unable to suppress the sound as renewed desire coursed through me.

Everly turned her head toward me, her dark eyes heavy-lidded but alert, pupils blown wide with lingering arousal.

I claimed her mouth in a deep kiss, tasting the sweetness of her tongue as it tangled with mine.

Through the bond, I experienced the dual sensation of kissing and being kissed, of dominating and yielding simultaneously.

It was dizzying, perspective shifting like quicksilver.

My hand slid down her sweat-dampened body, fingers trailing over the soft curve of her stomach until I reached the junction of her thighs.

She was still joined with Khaaz, his cock buried to the hilt inside her, but I could feel her need for more building again, echoing my own rising desire.

I found her clit, swollen and sensitive from our previous attentions, and circled it gently with my thumb.

The effect was immediate and threefold—Everly's back arched, her gasp swallowed by my mouth as pleasure shot through her.

Khaaz groaned as her internal muscles clenched around him in response.

And I felt both sensations as if they were happening to my own body—the exquisite pressure on her sensitive bud and the tight, wet heat squeezing around a cock that wasn't mine.

The bond between us amplified everything, creating a circuit of pleasure that fed into itself.

Khaaz began to move inside her with shallow thrusts, his massive hands gripping her hips to control the depth.

I continued to stroke her clit, matching his rhythm as I devoured her mouth.

Through our connection, I could feel Khaaz's pleasure building alongside Everly's, their shared sensations feeding into my own arousal until my cock was fully hard again, pressing insistently against Everly's thigh.

I pulled away from our kiss, my breathing ragged as I fought for control. Everly's eyes met mine, dark with desire and trust. Without words, I knew what I wanted—what we all wanted. The bond hummed between us, carrying intentions and desires more clearly than speech ever could.

I shifted my position, moving to kneel beside them.

With gentle but firm hands, I guided them, helping Everly roll over to face Khaaz while maintaining their connection.

Her back was now to Khaaz's chest, her legs spread wide across his thick thighs.

Khaaz's scarred hands wrapped around her, one cupping her breast, the other splayed

possessively across her stomach.

His eyes met mine over her shoulder, a challenge and invitation in their depths.

“Mine,” I growled, though the word was unnecessary. The bond carried my meaning more clearly than language—she was mine, yes, but also ours. Both of us belonging to her as much as she belonged to us.

I positioned myself between their spread legs, taking in the erotic tableau they created.

Khaaz’s cock disappeared into Everly’s core, her pink flesh stretched around his girth.

Her arousal glistened on both of them, evidence of her body’s eager response to our attention.

I stroked myself slowly, savoring the anticipation that hummed through all three of us.

Khaaz lifted his hips, driving deeper into Everly and drawing a soft moan from her lips.

Through our bond, I felt the delicious stretch as his cock filled her completely, the pressure against sensitive spots inside that made her toes curl.

My own cock throbbed in response, eager to join in that tight, welcoming heat.

I leaned forward, pressing my chest against Everly’s as my mouth found hers in a demanding kiss.

My cock slid along Khaaz's length where it disappeared into Everly's body, the friction sending jolts of pleasure through all three of us.

Everly whimpered into my mouth, her hands clutching at my shoulders as she recognized my intentions.

"More," she gasped against my lips, the word unnecessary but welcome confirmation of what I already felt through our bond—her desire to be filled completely, to take both of us at once.

I reached between us, my fingers finding her entrance where it was already stretched around Khaaz.

With careful patience, I worked one finger inside alongside his cock, feeling her body resist then yield.

The dual sensation—the tightness around my finger and the pressure against Khaaz's sensitive flesh—reverberated through our bond, drawing groans from all of us.

A second finger joined the first, stretching her further as I prepared her to take both of us.

Her arousal flowed freely, easing the way as I worked her open with meticulous care.

Through our bond, I monitored her sensations carefully, alert for any sign of discomfort.

There was pressure, yes, and a burning stretch that danced along the edge of pain, but it was overwhelmed by the pleasure of being filled, of being the center of our attention and desire.

When I felt she was ready, I withdrew my fingers and positioned the head of my cock at her entrance, pressing against the tight ring of muscle already occupied by Khaaz.

The initial resistance was intense, her body fighting the intrusion despite her desire.

I held still, letting her adjust to the pressure while Khaaz remained motionless inside her.

“Breathe,” I instructed, the word rumbling from my chest as I stroked her clit again, building her pleasure to overcome the discomfort.

Her body relaxed incrementally, and I pressed forward with careful determination.

The head of my cock breached her entrance alongside Khaaz’s, the tight heat engulfing me inch by excruciating inch.

The sensation was indescribable—not only the physical pleasure of her body gripping me like a vise but also the echoed sensations through our bond.

I felt her stretch, the burning fullness that bordered on too much yet wasn’t enough.

I felt Khaaz’s pleasure as my cock slid against his inside her tight channel, the friction between us adding another layer of sensation.

Sweat beaded on my brow as I fought for control, resisting the urge to thrust fully into that welcoming heat.

Everly’s breath came in short gasps, her body trembling with the effort of accommodating both of us.

Khaaz’s hands tightened on her hips, his claws extending slightly to prick her

skin—not breaking it, but adding pinpoints of sensation that distracted from the stretch.

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By degrees, I worked my way inside until I was fully seated alongside Khaaz, both of us buried to the hilt in Everly's core.

We remained motionless for long moments, adjusting to the overwhelming sensations that ricocheted through our bond.

Everly's inner muscles fluttered around us, adjusting to the unprecedented fullness, each small movement sending waves of pleasure through all three of us.

When I finally began to move, it was with shallow, careful thrusts.

Khaaz followed my lead, establishing a counter-rhythm so that as I withdrew, he pushed deeper, ensuring Everly was never empty.

The drag of our cocks against each other inside her tight channel created friction that had us all gasping, the pleasure building exponentially through our shared bond.

I reached between us, finding Everly's clit again.

It was swollen and hard beneath my touch, sensitive enough that even the lightest pressure had her crying out.

Through our connection, I felt exactly how to touch her—not just the physical sensations but the building pressure of her approaching climax.

I circled the sensitive bud with my thumb, matching the rhythm of our thrusts as Khaaz pinched and rolled her nipples between his fingers.

The three-way feedback of pleasure was overwhelming—I felt my own building orgasm, the tightening pressure at the base of my spine.

I felt Khaaz's matching arousal, his cock throbbing alongside mine inside Everly's tight heat.

And most intensely, I felt Everly's pleasure spiraling higher and higher, her body caught in a storm of sensation as we filled and stimulated her from all sides.

Our pace increased organically, control slipping as pleasure mounted.

Everly writhed between us, her small form completely at our mercy yet somehow commanding us with her responses.

Every gasp, every clench of her internal muscles around our cocks drove us to please her more, better, driving her toward the peak we could all feel approaching.

I leaned forward, my chest pressing against Everly's as my face came level with Khaaz's over her shoulder.

His iridescent gaze met mine, pupils fully dilated with pleasure and something more—a recognition, an acceptance, a surrender.

Without conscious thought, I closed the distance between us, capturing his mouth in a fierce kiss as we continued to thrust into Everly's willing body.

The shock of it rippled through our bond—the taste of him, male and Rodinian and so different from Everly yet no less intoxicating.

His initial surprise gave way to acceptance, then hunger as his tongue tangled with mine.

Through our connection, I felt his response—the unexpected pleasure, the realization that this three-way bond meant we belonged to each other as much as we both belonged to Everly.

The claiming was instinctive, primal. My teeth caught his lower lip, not breaking skin but applying enough pressure to communicate my intent.

His submission was immediate, his body relaxing beneath mine even as we both continued to move inside Everly.

The bond between us solidified, crystalizing into something unbreakable—not just two males sharing a female, but three beings intertwined on every level.

Everly's pleasure peaked first, her climax crashing through her with such intensity that her scream was silent, her body rigid between us as wave after wave of ecstasy washed through her.

Her inner muscles clamped down on us with bruising force, the rhythmic pulsing sending us both over the edge alongside her.

I roared against Khaaz's mouth as my release tore through me, my seed pumping deep inside Everly alongside his.

The bond between us magnified everything—I felt not only my own climax but theirs as well, creating an endless loop of pleasure that seemed to stretch into infinity.

Khaaz's growl vibrated against my lips, his larger body shuddering beneath mine as he emptied himself inside our shared mate.

Time lost meaning as we rode out the storm together, three bodies moving as one, three minds joined in pleasure so intense it bordered on pain.

When awareness finally returned, we were a tangle of limbs and ragged breathing, still joined but too exhausted to move.

Everly was sandwiched between us, her small form cradled protectively by our larger bodies.

Our combined release leaked from her despite our cocks still buried inside, evidence of the thoroughness of our claiming.

Through our newly strengthened bond, I felt their contentment mirroring my own—a bone-deep satisfaction that went beyond the physical.

In this moment, spent and sated with my mates in my arms, I understood why fate-mates were the closest thing to a religion Rodinians had.

This connection transcended the physical, the emotional, even the spiritual.

It was primal yet divine, ancient yet newborn, as essential to survival as breathing.

We were bonded now, truly and irrevocably. Whatever challenges awaited us beyond this sanctuary we would face them together. Three beings who had found each other across impossible odds, joined now in a bond that nothing in this universe could sever.

My protective instincts flared as I tightened my arms around them both, Everly's soft form and Khaaz's scarred one equally precious to me now.

Mine to protect. Mine to cherish. Mine to pleasure.

And I, in turn, belonged to them completely.

Legion Reaper, yes, but more than that—mate, protector, bonded one.

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I woke before the others, my body still humming with the aftereffects of our bonding.

The weight of Everly's small form pressed against my chest, her warmth seeping into scars I'd long thought would never feel anything but pain.

Zehn's massive arm stretched across her, his hand resting on my hip in a possessive grip that should have made me bristle but instead anchored me to this moment, to this reality where I belonged to them and they to me.

The bond between us pulsed with their sleeping contentment, a steady rhythm that matched the beating of our hearts.

For the first time since my creation in that sterile lab, I felt something unfamiliar settling in my chest: hope.

The facility's ambient lighting gradually brightened to simulate dawn, casting a soft blue glow across our makeshift bed.

I traced my claws gently along Everly's spine, marveling at the smoothness of her skin compared to my scarred, fur-covered form.

Through our bond, I sensed her pleasure at my touch, even in sleep.

The connection between us remained overwhelming—feeling not just my own sensations but echoes of theirs as well.

Zehn stirred, his golden eyes opening to meet mine over Everly's dark head.

Something passed between us, an understanding that transcended words.

Before our bonding, I would have looked away, intimidated by the Legion Reaper's intensity.

Now, I held his gaze, accepting the silent communion between us.

We were no longer just allies of convenience, but something deeper—bound by our shared love for the small human female between us and now, inexorably, to each other.

“Good morning,” he rumbled, his deep voice barely above a whisper to avoid waking Everly.

I dipped my head in acknowledgment, still more comfortable with gestures than words. Through our bond, I felt his amusement at my reticence, his acceptance of it.

The peaceful moment shattered as the communications array in the corner of the room emitted a sharp, insistent beep.

Everly jolted awake between us, her dark eyes blinking rapidly as she oriented herself.

Her confusion rippled through our bond, quickly replaced by clarity as she remembered where she was—and who she was with.

“What's that?” she asked, her voice husky with sleep.

“Legion frequency,” Zehn said, already rising from our bed with fluid grace despite his massive form. He moved to the console, his naked body a testament to lethal power, muscles rippling beneath sleek fur as he checked the readout. “It's

Command.”

My stomach tightened with instinctive wariness.

Though Zehn had assured me repeatedly that we could trust Legion Command, years of conditioning were hard to overcome.

I sat up, positioning myself slightly in front of Everly in a protective stance that earned me a warm pulse of affection through our bond.

Zehn activated the communicator. “Reaper One, this is Command,” the officer stated, his voice crisp and authoritative. “Report status.”

“Command, this is Reaper One.”

Something that sounded close to a sigh of relief answered. “Your tracking beacon went offline three cycles ago. We’ve been attempting to reestablish contact.”

“I was strafed while entering an uncharted planet’s defense perimeter.

During neutralization, communications were temporarily compromised.

” Zehn’s voice remained steady, revealing none of the tumultuous events that had led us to this point—my rescue from the lab, our crash landing, the sentinel drones, the black site facility, encountering our fate mate and subsequent bonding.

The commander grunted, seemingly accepting this explanation.

“We have a recon unit in your sector. Transmitting extraction coordinates now.” The console beside Zehn beeped as it received the data.

“They will reach your position in approximately one rotation. Confirm you can hold position until extraction.”

“Confirmed, Command. Position is secure.” Then Zehn paused. “While here, I have shared unity and found my fate mates. The extraction team should know that they need to accomodate three of us.”

The commander drew in a sharp breath. “Are they safe?”

“Affirmative, Command. We are safe and prepared for extraction.”

“Acknowledged, Reaper One. Sending recon units double time. Command out.”

The comms channel crackled once more then silenced, leaving the three of us in sudden silence. I released the breath I hadn’t realized I’d been holding, my arms still protectively wrapped around Everly. She leaned back against my chest, her warmth a comforting weight.

“So we’re getting picked up tomorrow?” she asked, looking between Zehn and me.

Zehn nodded, returning to the bed. “The Legion recon unit will extract us, take us somewhere safe. From there, we can decide our next steps.”

I should have felt relief. The thought of rescue, of safety, should have eased the tension that had been my constant companion since escaping the lab. Instead, a different anxiety twisted in my gut. What place would I have in the world beyond this facility?

Worse, what if they tried to separate us? The thought sent a spike of primal fear through me, strong enough that both Zehn and Everly turned to me, concern evident in their expressions and through our bond.

“Khaaz?” Everly’s voice was soft, her hand coming up to cup my scarred cheek. “What’s wrong?”

I struggled to find words for the fear clawing at my insides. “What happens...after?” I finally managed, my voice rough with emotion. “When we leave here?”

Understanding dawned in Zehn’s golden eyes. He moved closer, his larger body bracketing mine against Everly. “You’re worried about your place. About whether you’ll be accepted.”

It wasn’t a question, but I nodded anyway, unable to meet his gaze. Through our bond, I couldn’t hide the root of my fear—that this perfect belonging we’d found was temporary, that the outside world would tear us apart.

Zehn’s hand caught my chin, forcing me to look at him. “Listen to me, Khaaz. We are bonded now—all three of us. Nothing and no one can change that.”

“But I’m not—” I began, the words sticking in my throat.

“Not what? Not Rodinian enough? Did you not hear Command? The first thing he asked was if my fate mates were safe.” Zehn’s voice held a hint of a growl.

“Rodinian society holds to very few absolute truths, but there are two that are sacred above all else. First, fate mates are the closest thing we have to a religion. Second, never, go between a Rodinian and his mate.”

Everly’s fingers traced patterns on my chest, her touch soothing the agitation our bond had stirred in her.

“He’s right, Khaaz. I’ve been reading the archives here—the Kridrin studied Rodinian culture extensively.

The mate bond is the cornerstone of their society.

It's literally their only taboo to interfere with it. ”

I knew this, all of this. That is why I wanted to protect Everly in the first place. Still, knowing in my mind was different from knowing it in truth.

His hand slid to the back of my neck, strong fingers kneading the tense muscles there. “In case you need reminding, I claimed you as thoroughly as I claimed Everly.”

Heat rushed through me at the memory—Zehn's mouth on mine as we both moved inside Everly, the way he'd dominated me even as we shared her, the unspoken promise of more.

Through our bond, I felt his desire rekindle at the memory, matched by Everly's growing arousal as she sensed the direction of our thoughts.

“I expected only to keep you safe. I don't know how to be this,” I admitted, gesturing vaguely at the three of us. “Whatever we are now.”

“None of us do,” Everly said, rising to her knees to face both of us. “We're making it up as we go. But we're making it up together.”

Her simple declaration settled something inside me.

The fear didn't vanish entirely—I doubted it ever would, given my past—but it receded, overshadowed by the certainty that no power in the universe could separate me from these two beings who had somehow become my whole world.

I might not know what awaited us beyond this sanctuary, but I knew with bone-deep certainty that I would fight to the death to protect what we'd found.

“One more day,” Zehn said, breaking the moment as he rose from the bed. “We should prepare. The recon team will expect a report, and we need to decide what information to share about this facility.”

Everly nodded, her practical nature asserting itself. “I’ve been cataloging the archives. There’s information here that could be valuable to the Legion—especially about the Kridrin and their technology.”

I watched them both, feeling a surge of pride at their competence. My mate—mates—were not just physically beautiful but formidably intelligent as well. I might never fully rid myself of the shadows of my past, but with them, I could step into the light.

“We should hunt,” I suggested, finding my voice stronger than before. “Provide one more fresh meal before we leave.”

Zehn nodded approvingly. “Good idea. The facility’s stores are adequate, but nothing compares to fresh meat.”

We dressed quickly in the practical clothing we’d found in the facility’s supplies.

Everly remained behind to continue her work with the archives while Zehn and I prepared for the hunt.

As we moved through the facility toward the exit, a new ease existed between us—the bond humming with shared purpose and unspoken understanding.

Outside, the alien landscape stretched before us, bathed in the golden light of early morning.

We moved in tandem, two predators tracking prey through unfamiliar terrain.

Where before we had maintained a careful distance, now we operated as a single unit, communicating through subtle gestures and the deep awareness of each other's movements that our bond provided.

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We found a herd of herbivores grazing in a valley about two kilometers from the facility—creatures resembling Earth’s deer but with six legs and curving horns that spiraled from their heads.

With silent coordination, we separated to flank our chosen target—a mature male grazing slightly apart from the others.

I circled downwind, using the terrain for cover as Zehn positioned himself for the drive.

When he gave the signal—a short, sharp whistle—I burst from cover, driving the creature toward where Zehn waited.

The animal was fast, its six legs giving it tremendous speed, but we were faster.

Zehn intercepted it with a powerful leap, bringing it down with a clean strike to the neck that severed its spine.

The kill was efficient, merciful, and deeply satisfying on a primal level.

As we field-dressed the carcass, I found myself speaking more freely than I had in years, discussing hunting techniques that had been downloaded into my brain while I was in containment.

Zehn listened with genuine interest, sharing his own experiences from different worlds where Legion missions had taken him.

By the time we returned to the facility, carrying our cleaned and butchered prize between us, something fundamental had shifted in our relationship.

The bond between us had deepened, no longer just an extension of our shared connection to Everly but something unique to us—two predators who recognized each other as equals.

Everly met us at the facility entrance, her face lighting up at the sight of our successful hunt. “You’re back! I was starting to wonder if you’d gotten lost.”

“Not lost,” Zehn rumbled, pride evident in his voice. “Just thorough.”

We prepared the meal together in the facility’s small kitchen area.

I took charge of the meat, my knife skills honed from years of survival, while Zehn prepared vegetation we’d gathered along with our hunt.

Everly contributed edible plants she’d discovered in the facility’s greenhouse section, creating a feast that honored our last night in this sanctuary that had brought us together.

After we ate, Everly insisted on cleaning up, shooing us both toward the bathing facilities with firm instructions to wash away the scent of the hunt. We complied, amused by her bossiness.

The bathing chamber was designed for multiple users, with several shower heads positioned around a central area.

Zehn and I entered together, stripping off our clothing with the unselfconsciousness of warriors accustomed to communal living.

As the warm water cascaded over us, I became acutely aware of his gaze on my scarred body.

“They hurt you badly,” he said, his voice low as his eyes traced the network of scars that covered my torso and limbs.

I nodded, not trusting my voice. Through our bond, I felt his anger at what had been done to me, and beneath it, a fierce protectiveness that matched my own feelings toward him and Everly.

“They will never touch you again,” he promised, his hand coming up to rest on my shoulder. “Not while I draw breath.”

The moment stretched between us, charged with unspoken emotion. Then Everly’s voice called from the doorway, breaking the tension.

“Are you two almost done? Because I was thinking we could make the most of our last night here.”

We turned to find her leaning against the doorframe, wearing nothing but a smile. Through our bond, her desire reached us—warm and inviting, tinged with the playfulness that was uniquely hers.

We dried quickly and followed her to our sleeping area, where she had arranged the bedding into a comfortable nest. She met us in the center, her small form dwarfed by our larger bodies but radiating confidence and desire that matched our own.

What followed was different from our initial bonding—less frantic, more deliberate.

We took our time exploring each other, mapping responses and reactions through touch and taste and the deeper awareness our bond provided.

I found myself drawn to Everly's core, the sweet scent of her arousal calling to me like a beacon.

When I settled between her thighs, her hands tangled in my mane, guiding me to where she wanted my mouth.

I took my time, savoring her unique flavor as I worked her with my tongue.

Through our bond, I felt exactly what pleased her most—the broad strokes that made her gasp, the pointed tip that made her writhe.

Zehn knelt beside her, swallowing her moans with deep kisses as his hands caressed her breasts.

When she came against my tongue, her thighs trembling around my head, the shared pleasure nearly undid me. I felt her climax as if it were my own, the sweet release washing through all three of us through our bond.

Before I could recover, Zehn was moving, positioning me so that I remained between Everly's legs. With gentle guidance, he helped me enter her, both of us groaning as her tight heat enveloped my cock. Then I felt his presence behind me, his body caging mine as his hands gripped my hips.

"Yes," I gasped, understanding his intent without words. Through our bond, I felt his approval, his desire, and beneath it all, his need to claim me fully as I claimed Everly.

The first press of his cock against my entrance was a burning stretch that bordered on pain.

He worked me open with patient determination, using oil from the facility's supplies to ease the way.

When he finally breached me, the fullness was overwhelming—a physical echo of the completeness our bond had created between us.

We moved together in perfect synchrony, Zehn setting the pace for all three of us.

Each thrust of his hips drove me deeper into Everly, creating a circuit of pleasure that flowed through our bond.

I felt everything—the tight heat of Everly around my cock, the thick pressure of Zehn inside me, and through our bond, their pleasure magnifying my own.

When Zehn's teeth found the base of my neck, the claiming bite sent a shock wave through my entire body. The bond between us flared blindingly bright, cementing what had begun during our first joining. I was his as surely as I was Everly's, and they were both mine in return.

The triple climax that followed transcended anything I'd experienced before—three bodies, three minds, three souls joined in perfect unity.

As we collapsed together, a tangle of limbs and ragged breathing, I felt a completeness I'd never imagined possible.

No longer a failed experiment, a hybrid abomination, but a bonded mate. Claimed. Wanted. Loved.

For the first time in my existence, I belonged. And as sleep claimed me, cradled between my mates, I knew with absolute certainty that nothing—not Legion Command, not whatever awaited us beyond this sanctuary—could ever take that away from me.

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The Legion recon vessel descended through the atmosphere at dawn, its sleek form cutting through the mist that shrouded the facility.

I stood at the entrance with my mates flanking me—Everly's small form to my right, Khaaz's scarred bulk to my left.

Through our bond, I felt their tension mirroring my own.

This would be the first test of our newly formed connection, the first time others would witness what we had become to each other.

My hand found Everly's, fingers intertwining with hers while my other arm pressed against Khaaz's shoulder in silent reassurance.

Whatever came next, we would face it together.

The vessel's landing gear extended as it approached, touching down with practiced precision on the clearing we'd prepared.

The engine's hum decreased to a low purr before cutting out entirely.

For a moment, nothing moved. Then the side hatch slid open, revealing four Legion soldiers in full combat gear.

I recognized the insignia of the Seventh Recon Division—elite scouts known for their discretion and efficiency. Good. Command had sent their best, which meant they understood the sensitivity of our situation.

“Remain here,” I murmured to my mates, stepping forward to meet the approaching soldiers. The lead officer removed his helmet, revealing the gray-striped muzzle of a veteran Rodinian.

“Commander Zehn,” he said, offering the formal salute of one warrior to another. “Lieutenant Sarrik, Seventh Recon. We’ve been sent to extract you and your mates.”

His curious gaze toward Everly and Khaaz didn’t escape my notice, nor the way his nostrils flared as he took in our combined scents. The claiming marks would be obvious to any Rodinian, as would the nature of our three-way bond.

“Lieutenant,” I acknowledged, returning his salute. “My mates and I are ready for extraction. The facility has been secured, and we’ve gathered significant data regarding its origins and purpose.”

“Of course, Commander,” he replied smoothly. “We’re here to ensure your safe return to Legion space, nothing more.”

I felt a wave of relief through our bond—Khaaz’s anxiety easing slightly at the lieutenant’s words. Everly’s curiosity piqued as she observed the interaction, her analytical mind already assessing the power dynamics at play.

“Your prowler has been located,” Sarrik continued. “Second team is securing it for transport now. Is there anything else that needs retrieval from this location?”

“The research data,” Everly said, stepping forward to stand beside me.

Her voice was clear and confident despite her small stature among the towering Rodinians.

“There are several data cores I’ve extracted from the facility’s archives.

They contain information about the Kridrin that could be vital to Legion intelligence.
”

Sarrik’s gaze shifted to her, then to Khaaz who had moved protectively to her other side.

I felt the lieutenant’s assessment as he took in Khaaz’s hybrid features, the extensive scarring that marked him as something other than a pure Rodinian.

To my satisfaction, Sarrik’s expression showed only professional interest, not disgust or suspicion.

“We’ll ensure everything is transferred securely,” he said, gesturing to one of his team members. “Specialist Mrek will assist with the data cores.”

A younger Rodinian stepped forward, nodding respectfully to Everly. “If you’ll show me what needs to be transported, ma’am?”

Everly glanced at me, and I gave her a slight nod. Through our bond, I sent reassurance—these were my people, disciplined soldiers who respected the chain of command. She and Khaaz would be treated with dignity.

“This way,” she said to the specialist, leading him back into the facility with Khaaz following close behind, his protective instincts evident in every line of his body.

While they gathered the research materials, I briefed Sarrik on the sentinel drones we’d neutralized and the facility’s defense systems. He listened attentively, occasionally making notes on his datapad.

“Command will want a full report,” he said when I’d finished. “This discovery could have significant strategic implications, especially if there are more Kridrin derelicts

such as this one in Legion space.”

I nodded, thinking of the archives Everly had been studying. “There may be. The facility’s records indicate an extensive network, though many of the coordinates are in dimensional shorthand we haven’t fully decoded yet.”

“All the more reason to get you and your mates back to Rodinia Tertius quickly,” Sarrik replied. “The science division there is better equipped for this kind of analysis.”

The mention of a science division sent a spike of alarm through our bond—Khaaz’s fear flaring as he and Everly returned with the specialist, each carrying containers of data cores.

I moved to Khaaz’s side immediately, my hand finding the back of his neck in a gesture of comfort and possession. “Not that science division,” I assured him quietly. “These are legitimate researchers, nothing like the Kridrin engineers that hurt you. I give you my word.”

Khaaz’s tension eased slightly at my touch, though the wariness remained in his eyes. Through our bond, I felt Everly’s protective anger on his behalf, her determination that he would never again be treated as an experiment.

“Your mate will be treated with all the respect due a bonded Rodinian,” Sarrik said firmly, surprising me with his directness. “Command has made that explicitly clear to all divisions.”

I hadn’t expected such open acknowledgment, and from Khaaz’s startled expression, neither had he. A weight I hadn’t realized I’d been carrying lifted from my shoulders. Command wasn’t just accepting our unusual bond—they were actively protecting it.

“Then we’re ready to leave,” I said, gathering my mates with a glance. “This place has served its purpose.”

As we boarded the recon vessel, I cast one last look at the Kridrin facility that had brought us together. For all its alien technology and mysterious origins, it had given us something priceless—the bond that now hummed between us, strong and unbreakable.

The journey to the Legion carrier stationed in orbit was brief but tense.

Khaaz remained alert, his body coiled for action despite my constant reassurance through our bond.

Everly, ever adaptable, engaged Lieutenant Sarrik in conversation about Legion protocols and structure, her natural intelligence and curiosity evident in her pointed questions.

“Your human mate is quite knowledgeable,” Sarrik commented to me as we approached the carrier.

“She’s not just knowledgeable,” I replied with pride. “She single-handedly disabled the facility’s defense systems and bomb countermeasures. Without her, neither Khaaz nor I would have survived.”

Sarrik’s respect was evident in his nod. “Command will be interested in that skillset.”

I felt a flash of possessiveness at his words. “Everly is not a resource to be utilized. She’s my mate—our mate,” I amended, including Khaaz with a glance.

“Of course, Commander,” Sarrik said smoothly. “I meant no disrespect. It’s simply rare to find such abilities.”

Before I could respond, the vessel docked with the carrier, the airlock cycling with a soft hiss. As we disembarked, I kept Everly and Khaaz close, my protective instincts heightened in the unfamiliar environment.

The carrier's commanding officer, a stern-faced female Rodinian with the rank insignia of a Captain, met us at the docking bay. She offered me the formal salute of equals, acknowledging my status as a Legion Reaper.

"Commander Zehn," she said, her voice crisp. "I'm Captain Lirrik. Welcome aboard the Starclaw. We've been instructed to transport you and your mates directly to Rodinia Tertius for debriefing."

I returned her salute. "Captain. My prowler?"

"Already secured in the lower bay," she replied. "Engineering reports damage to the propulsion systems but nothing that can't be repaired en route."

She turned her attention to Everly and Khaaz, her gaze assessing but not unfriendly. "Quarters have been prepared for you in the officers' section. We've allocated a suite designed for families rather than standard personnel quarters."

Through our bond, I felt Everly's surprise and Khaaz's cautious relief. The Legion's accommodation was unexpected but welcome—further evidence that Command was treating our bond with appropriate respect.

"Thank you, Captain," I said. "When will we be underway?"

"As soon as you're settled," she replied. "Estimated arrival at Rodinia Tertius is three standard cycles. Command has requested a preliminary briefing via secure channel in two hours."

I nodded my acknowledgment, and Captain Lirrik assigned a junior officer to escort us to our quarters.

As we moved through the carrier's corridors, I noted the reactions of the crew we passed—curious glances, respectful nods, but no overt hostility or disgust. Word of our unusual bond had clearly spread, but Legion discipline held firm.

Our assigned quarters were spacious by carrier standards—a main living area with attached sleeping chamber and private bathing facilities. The furnishings were simple but comfortable, designed for beings larger than Everly but accommodating her smaller size with adjustable features.

“Not bad,” Everly said, exploring the space with her usual curiosity. “Definitely an upgrade from the facility.”

Khaaz moved to check the entry points and scanning for surveillance devices, his caution ingrained from years of survival. Finding nothing concerning, he finally relaxed enough to settle on one of the sleeping platforms, his scarred form still tense but no longer poised for immediate flight.

I joined him, our shoulders touching in silent communion. Through our bond, his unspoken question reached me: Is this real? Are we truly safe?

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“Yes,” I murmured, answering aloud. “This is real. You are under my protection, under Legion protection now. Both of you.”

Everly came to sit on my other side, her small hand finding mine. “I have to admit, I didn’t expect such acceptance in reality. Especially of the three of us together.”

“Rodinian culture holds the mate bond sacred above all else,” I explained, putting into words what I’d tried to convey before.

“It transcends rank, politics, even interspecies differences. Once formed, it’s considered inviolable.

That’s why Command didn’t question your presence, Everly, or yours, Khaaz.

To do so would violate our most fundamental reason for being. ”

“Convenient,” Everly said with a small smile.

“Pragmatic,” I corrected gently. “Rodinians are, above all, practical. Our society functions because we recognize and respect bonds of all kinds—warrior to commander, citizen to state, and most importantly, mate to mate. It’s not sentiment but survival.”

The preliminary briefing with Command went better than I’d anticipated.

The holographic projection of Commander Thorvik, my direct superior for the past seven cycles, showed no surprise at the sight of my mates seated beside me.

He acknowledged them with a formal greeting before focusing on the mission parameters.

“The facility you discovered appears to be of significant strategic value,” he said, his gruff voice filling our quarters. “The initial data you transmitted confirms our suspicions about Kridrin activity in the sector from years past. We need a full debriefing when you reach Rodinia Tertius.”

“Understood, Commander,” I replied. “Everly has extracted extensive archives from the facility’s database. They contain information about Kridrin technology, dimensional transit capabilities, and possibly locations of other outposts.”

Thorvik’s gaze shifted to Everly, who sat straight-backed beside me. “Your assistance in this matter is appreciated, Ms. Flores. Once we reach Rodinia Tertius, we can arrange transport back to Terra Prime if you wish to return home.”

The suggestion sent a wave of primal rage through me before I could control it. A growl built in my chest, echoed by Khaaz’s deeper rumble. The thought of Everly being separated from us, even by her own choice, was physically painful.

To my relief, Everly laughed, her hand finding mine in a calming gesture. “That won’t be necessary, Commander. My home is with my mates now. Wherever they go, I go.”

Through our bond, her certainty rang like a bell—clear, pure, unquestioning. She had chosen us, completely and without reservation.

Thorvik nodded, unsurprised. “As you wish. In that case, we’ll arrange permanent accommodations for all three of you on Rodinia Tertius. The debriefing process may take several cycles, possibly longer given the volume of data you’ve recovered.”

“And after?” I asked, the question that had been forming in my mind since our bonding now taking shape. “What are your orders for us following the debriefing?”

Thorvik’s expression softened slightly—as much as the old warrior ever allowed himself to show.

“That’s your decision, Zehn. Legion protocol offers retirement to any Reaper who finds their fate mates as you know.

Your service record entitles you to full benefits and placement anywhere in Legion territory. ”

The weight of his words settled over me. Retirement. The end of my life as a Legion Reaper, a role I’d held for over fifteen cycles. I’d never considered what might come after—Reapers rarely survived long enough to retire, and those who did often struggled to find purpose beyond the battlefield.

Yet as I looked at my mates—Everly’s intelligent eyes watching me carefully, Khaaz’s steady presence at my side—I realized I didn’t need to search for purpose. It was right here, in the bond we shared, in the future we would build together.

“I’ll take the retirement,” I said, the decision crystallizing as I spoke. “But I’d like to remain connected to Legion operations. Perhaps a position at the Academy, training new recruits.”

Thorvik nodded approvingly. “We can arrange that. Your experience would be valuable to the next generation of warriors.” His gaze shifted to Khaaz. “And your mate? With his combat abilities, he might also find a place there if he wishes.”

Khaaz stiffened beside me, surprise rippling through our bond. The offer of legitimate work, of recognition for his skills rather than his origins, was clearly unexpected.

“I would consider it,” Khaaz said carefully, his deep voice rough with emotion.

“As for Ms. Flores,” Thorvik continued, “her technical skills and familiarity with the Kridrin archives would make her an asset to our intelligence division. If she’s interested, of course.”

Everly’s excitement pulsed through our bond—the prospect of meaningful work, of putting her analytical mind to use in this new world she’d chosen to join.

“I’d be very interested,” she said firmly. “Especially if it means working with the Kridrin data we recovered.”

“Then it’s settled,” Thorvik concluded. “We’ll finalize the arrangements when you reach Rodinia Tertius. For now, rest and recover from your ordeal. You’ve earned it.”

As the holographic projection faded, I pulled my mates closer, one arm around each of them. Through our bond, I felt their contentment, their hope for the future we would build together.

“So,” Everly said, breaking the comfortable silence. “We’re really doing this. Starting a new life together on an alien planet.”

“Not alien to me,” I reminded her with a smile. “But yes, together. The three of us.”

Khaaz’s arm tightened around my waist, his scarred face relaxing into something close to peace. “Together,” he echoed, the word filled with wonder.

As the Starclaw carried us toward Rodinia Tertius and our new life, I marveled at how completely my existence had transformed.

Three cycles ago, I had been a Legion Reaper on a routine extraction mission.

Now I was bonded to two extraordinary beings, retiring from active duty to build a future I'd never dared imagine.

The universe, it seemed, had plans far greater than my own limited vision.

It had brought us together across impossible odds—a human woman with ancient connections to the Kridrin, a hybrid warrior created through suffering yet defined by his resilience, and me, a Legion Reaper who had found purpose beyond battle.

Our bond hummed between us, stronger with each passing moment.

Whatever challenges awaited us on Rodinia Tertius—the debriefings, the transition to civilian life, the inevitable adjustments to our unusual relationship—we would face them together.

Three beings who had found each other across the vastness of space and time, joined now in a bond that nothing in this universe could sever.

Our story was just beginning, and I couldn't wait to see what came next.

Exclusive Bonus Scene from FOUND

So, what happens after Everly bonds with not one, but two massive alien warriors who purr, bite, and worship the ground she walks on?

Let's just say the stars aren't the only things lighting up.

This scene takes place right before the epilogue. It's Everly, Zehn, and Khaaz at their most connected, possessive, and completely obsessed with one another.

Content Considerations

- MFM ménage (anal x vaginal penetration)
- Marking/bonding bites
- Praise, possessiveness, post-coital affection
- Humor, emotional intimacy, and a whole lot of heat

(No humiliation, degradation, or non-consent—just loving, spicy chaos with claws and tails.)

They say stars are quiet. That space is all hush and stillness.

But no one tells you how loud it is to share a bed with two enormous aliens who purr in stereo.

The vibrations traveled through my bones, humming a lullaby I never knew I needed until I found myself permanently tucked between two seven-foot leopard men with possessive streaks wider than the galactic rim.

I was the sandwich.

And not in the cute picnic way.

More like the spread-me-open-and-lick-every-part-of-me-until-I'm-vibrating-like-a-ship-engine kind of sandwich.

Zehn was behind me, all heat and growling restraint, his chest pressed to my back, one massive arm hooked possessively under my breasts.

His fur tickled my skin, soft and warm, a stark contrast to the hardened muscles

underneath.

Khaaz was in front, his breath slow against my neck, his hand resting just over my belly like he was protecting something fragile. His scars—raised ridges that mapped stories I was still learning—pressed against my softer flesh, constant reminders of what he'd survived.

The three of us fit together now.

Too well.

Almost dangerously well.

“I feel like pudding,” I mumbled into Khaaz's chest, breathing in his scent—something wild and mineral, like ozone and earth after rainfall.

Zehn rumbled behind me, amused. “A good kind?”

“The kind that's been thoroughly stirred and poured into a bowl that's way too big.” I sighed, stretching my toes down to brush against Zehn's ankle. “You two should come with warning labels.”

Khaaz nuzzled the top of my head, his whiskers tickling my scalp. “This one would say: Caution. Bites if denied affection.”

I snorted. “Yours would just be a purr track and some warning about claws and overachievement.”

Zehn kissed my shoulder where he'd marked me, his teeth grazing over the claim bite that had healed into a permanent scar. “Yours would say: Irresistible. Proceed at your own risk.”

Through the viewport above our bed, the endless void glittered with distant stars. Our ship drifted in the peaceful quiet of deep space, but inside our quarters, the air thickened with something electric.

I squirmed, trying to find a more comfortable position, and suddenly both of them stilled. The purring stopped all at once, like someone had cut the power.

“Everly,” Zehn said softly, his voice low and dangerous and hot enough to burn through titanium plating, “are you grinding against me?”

I froze, suddenly aware of how my ass had pressed back against something very firm and how Khaaz’s pupils had dilated to near-black discs. “No?”

Khaaz lifted his head slowly, his scarred muzzle inches from my face. “It is alright if you are. We enjoy when you move.”

I’d just wanted to shift positions.

Now? I wanted everything.

Again.

I turned, pulling the covers down to expose my skin to the cool recycled air. “Then maybe I should move more.”

Zehn growled and rolled me onto my back, settling between my thighs with one smooth movement. His massive hands pinned mine above my head as his muzzle trailed down my throat. “We said you are ours, kitten. Let us prove it.”

Click below to read the full scene [here](#)

Read the Bonus Scene – Between the Stars

(Available exclusively when you sign up for my reader list!)

EVERLY

The three moons of Rodinia Tertius painted our bedroom in shades of silver and blue, casting long shadows across the furs of our sleeping platform.

I'd grown to love these quiet nights, when the hunting and training and politics fell away, leaving just the three of us in our private sanctuary.

Zehn lay with his head in my lap, his massive body sprawled across the furs like a contented housecat rather than the lethal predator I knew him to be.

His eyes were half-closed, a low purr rumbling from his chest as my fingers worked through his thick mane.

The night was cool, the moons casting silver light through the open terrace of our home.

Khaaz pressed against my side, warm and solid, his nose nuzzling the shell of my ear as he rumbled in contentment.

His scarred hand traced lazy patterns on my thigh, his touch reverent even after all these months together.

Overhead, the stars of this distant galaxy burned bright—stars I'd never seen from Earth, constellations that told Rodinian legends I was still learning. A breeze carrying the scent of night-blooming flowers drifted through the open archways, mingling with the musky, masculine scent of my mates.

Zehn's tail flicked lazily against my ankle, a gesture of possessive comfort that had become familiar. His purr deepened when my fingers found that sensitive spot behind his ear, the vibration traveling up my arm and settling somewhere deep in my chest.

"You spoil him," Khaaz murmured against my hair, his voice tinged with amusement.

"I spoil you both equally," I replied, turning to press a kiss against his jaw. The scars there felt rough against my lips, a reminder of all he'd survived before finding us.

Zehn made a sound halfway between a purr and a growl, his eyes slitting open to fix on his fellow mate. "She does. Though you required more convincing to accept it."

"Worth the wait," Khaaz said simply, his hand sliding around my waist to pull me closer against him.

It was quiet. Perfect. The kind of moment I'd store away in my memory to revisit on the rare occasions when my mates were called away on Legion business. The sound of their breathing, the heat of their bodies, the complete sense of safety I felt nowhere else but between them.

Until Zehn tilted his head, his golden eyes gleaming with mischief as he purred against my stomach. The deep vibration sent a shiver through me, but then—his nose twitched, once, twice. He inhaled deeply, his pupils dilating as he processed whatever scent he'd caught.

His voice, low and knowing, filled the air. "Our mate carries our cubs."

My breath caught. The world stilled. My fingers curled in his hair, my eyes widening as I sat up, looking between them.

"What?" I whispered, my heartbeat thundering in my chest.

Zehn smirked, lifting his head, dragging his tongue over my belly in slow appreciation. “I knew I smelled something different,” he purred. “You carry us both.”

Khaaz had gone completely still against me, his breathing shallow. Then, with a movement almost too fast to track, he shifted to kneel before me, his hands hovering over my still-flat stomach as though I’d suddenly become something infinitely precious and fragile.

“How is that possible?” I asked, my voice trembling. I knew Rodinians were genetically different from humans, that their reproductive biology operated differently, but this—carrying children from two fathers—seemed impossible.

“Fate provides,” Zehn said simply, as though that explained everything. To a Rodinian, perhaps it did.

Khaaz exhaled sharply, his hands suddenly reverent on my thighs, his forehead pressing against my shoulder as he let out a shaky breath. When he lifted his face, his eyes were wet with unshed tears.

“I never thought—” he began, then stopped, overcome. “No one like me has ever reproduced before. They said we couldn’t. They said we were sterile.”

The pain in his voice cut through my shock. I knew enough about his past to understand—he’d been created as a weapon, not meant to have a lineage or legacy. This was more than unexpected; for him, it was miraculous.

“Well, they were wrong about a lot of things,” I said, cupping his scarred cheek in my palm. “They were wrong about you.”

Zehn’s tail curled possessively around my ankle as he moved to join us, his massive body forming a protective circle. “Our bloodlines will join,” he said, pride evident in

every syllable. “The strongest Legion Reaper and the most lethal hybrid hunter. Our cubs will be formidable.”

And me? I laughed. Because of course. Of course this was how my life would turn out. Captured by a jungle planet. Claimed by two warriors. And now? Carrying their future.

I smiled, cupping both of their faces, pressing a kiss to each of them, breathing them in. Zehn’s confidence, Khaaz’s wonder, both of their unmitigated joy—it washed over me in waves, driving away any fear or doubt.

“How many?” I asked, suddenly curious about the practicalities. “Please tell me Rodinians don’t have litters.”

Zehn chuckled, his hand splaying across my belly. “Two,” he said confidently. “One of each. I can smell the difference.”

Khaaz pressed his ear against my stomach, though there couldn’t possibly be anything to hear yet. Still, he listened intently, his eyes closed in concentration. “Our family,” he whispered, the words reverent.

And as the stars glowed bright overhead, and I settled between my mates, between my forever, between my fate, I knew the truth. Fate knew what it was doing all along.

From Earth to the stars. From alone to beloved. From lost to found. Every step of my journey had been leading me here—to this moment, to these warriors, to the family we were creating together across the boundary of species and space.

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I should've turned around when my camel guide refused to go any farther.

In hindsight, that was the first red flag.

Not the cracked tablet with radiation warnings scratched in three languages.

Not the flickering lights dancing on the sand like a mirage was trying to seduce me with its best nightclub impression.

Nope. Just me, Jas Navarro, genius cryptid podcaster-slash-freelance journalist, trudging into a restricted zone in the Sahara like I was auditioning for a Darwin Award.

But curiosity is a hell of a drug. So is ambition. And I was chasing both like a girl on fire.

The desert stretched before me in endless waves of gold, each dune carved by wind into ripples that resembled an ocean frozen in time.

My boots sank with each step, leaving behind imprints that were already being erased by the restless sand.

Three hours since I'd left the last village.

Two since my guide had abandoned me with wild gestures and fervent prayers to Allah.

“Demon lights,” he’d said in broken English, pointing at the horizon where something pulsed beneath the sand. “Bad place. Very bad.”

I’d doubled his payment and promised to return by sunset. He’d laughed in my face.

“No return,” he’d said, patting his camel’s neck before climbing atop it. “Only ghosts return.”

Now, squinting through the afternoon haze, I understood his fear.

The air had changed. Thickened. Electric currents raced across my skin like phantom fingers, raising goosebumps despite the blistering heat.

My satellite phone had died an hour ago, and my compass spun in lazy circles, the needle twitching like it was having a seizure.

Classic signs of electromagnetic interference. The kind UFO hunters had wet dreams about.

I wiped a sweaty hand across my forehead, squinting through the heat haze toward the barely-there structure I’d spotted two dunes back.

It looked like a hunk of ancient metal half-buried in sand, sun-bleached and humming beneath my boots.

Definitely not Bedouin. Definitely not in any archaeology database I’d checked.

Which meant jackpot.

My podcast listeners would lose their minds. After three years of chasing legends—Bigfoot in the Pacific Northwest, ghost ships in the Bermuda Triangle, the Montauk monster—I’d finally found something that couldn’t be explained away by

weather patterns or drunk eyewitnesses. Something otherworldly.

If the anonymous tip that had led me here was right, this wasn't just a UFO landing site. It was a doorway. A gateway to somewhere else, activated every hundred years by the alignment of stars or electromagnetic fields or whatever cosmic bullshit my source had rambled about.

"The gateway will open soon," the email had read. "Three days after the winter solstice, when the Pleiades align with the Great Pyramid. Be there or wait another century."

I'd traced the IP address to a cybercafé in Cairo that had mysteriously burned down the next day.

Classic. The locals called this place Bab al-Jinn—the Door of Spirits.

Western explorers who'd ventured too close had disappeared, only to return months later with impossible stories and radiation burns.

All of which made for killer podcast material.

My recorder was already strapped to my backpack, and my GoCam was blinking green.

I crouched low, brushing sand off a slab of metal that curved up from the ground like a rib cage.

There were symbols etched into it—circles, slashes, alien geometry that didn't belong on Earth.

And the closer I got, the warmer it felt beneath my fingers.

“This is Jasmine Cruz Navarro,” I spoke into my recorder, keeping my voice steady despite the adrenaline pumping through my veins. “December twenty-fourth, approximately fourteen hundred hours. I’m at the coordinates sent by our anonymous source, and I’ve discovered what appears to be?—”

I paused, running my fingers along the grooves of the symbols. They were warm to the touch, almost hot, pulsing with what felt like a heartbeat.

“—what appears to be non-terrestrial technology of unknown origin and purpose. The metal has properties I’ve never encountered before. It’s warm, almost like it’s alive.”

I reached into my pack for my sample kit. A scraping here, a soil sample there—standard procedure for when I found something worth analyzing. But as I leaned closer, my long braid slipped over my shoulder, the tip brushing against the center symbol.

It flashed—a split-second of brilliant green light—and I jerked backward, heart hammering against my ribs.

“Shit,” I hissed, fumbling for my water bottle. My throat suddenly felt like I’d swallowed the Sahara. “Did you see that? Tell me the camera caught that.”

The symbols were glowing now, faint pulses of emerald and gold that reminded me of the Northern Lights I’d photographed in Alaska two years ago. They moved like liquid, flowing from one etching to another in geometric patterns that hurt my eyes to follow.

This was big. Bigger than anything I’d covered before. Governments would kill for this kind of discovery. Hell, if half the conspiracy theories about Area 51 were true, they already had.

This was either a UFO or a very elaborate prank. Either way, I’m getting a bonus.

I took a breath. Reached forward. Touched the center of the glyph.

The world blinked.

No sound. No wind. Just a vacuum suck that yanked the air out of my lungs and the sand out from under me. I screamed—maybe. Or maybe it was just in my head. The light flared around me in gold and green, and then the ground disappeared.

I fell.

Not down. Not up. There was no direction, no orientation, just the sensation of being stretched and compressed simultaneously, my body pulled apart at the atomic level and then slammed back together.

Colors that had no name streaked past me, smearing across my vision like wet paint.

The universe turned inside out, revealing its machinery—gears and cogs and impossible geometry that my human brain couldn't process.

Time collapsed. Expanded. Folded in on itself.

I tasted copper. Smelled ozone. Felt my cells vibrate at frequencies that threatened to shake me apart.

And then, as suddenly as it had begun, it stopped.

Tumbling, weightless, through a tunnel of burning light. I hit something—soft and sharp at the same time—and then heat slammed into me like a fist. Not Earth heat. Not even Sahara heat. This was wrong. Oppressive. Alive.

The sand here burned like fire. The air scraped my throat with every breath.

Two suns blazed overhead. No clouds. No shadows. No landmarks. Just dunes and a shimmering horizon and a sudden, deep, nauseating certainty.

I wasn't on Earth anymore.

The realization hit me like a physical blow, driving me to my knees. My stomach heaved, but nothing came up—just dry, painful retches that left me gasping. My ears popped, adjusting to the pressure change. My skin prickled with sweat that evaporated instantly in the brutal heat.

This couldn't be happening. Time travel, maybe. Hallucination, probably. But another planet? That was the stuff of bad sci-fi movies, not real life. Not my life.

And yet.

Two suns. Two fucking suns hanging in an alien sky that wasn't quite the right shade of blue—more teal than azure, deeper and more intense than Earth's atmosphere. No moon. No familiar constellations. Just vast, unforgiving space stretching above me like a cosmic joke at my expense.

"This isn't real," I wheezed, my voice sounding strange in the thinner air. "This is a heat stroke dream. Or someone drugged me. Or?—"

My pack was still on my back, heavier now in what felt like slightly stronger gravity. I fumbled for my satellite phone, though I already knew it was useless. No satellites here to connect to. No cell towers. No internet. No nothing.

I was alone in a way humans had never been alone before.

I staggered forward. My boots sank in the sand. My tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. My skin was boiling inside my clothes. I tried to think. Tried to record something, say something, but my vision blurred and the buzzing in my ears turned to

a roar.

The heat was overwhelming, crushing down on me like a vise.

Each breath felt like inhaling fire. I'd survived a war zone in Syria, an earthquake in Nepal, and a hurricane in Puerto Rico.

I'd stared down gun barrels and corrupt officials and competed with media sharks for the best shots.

But this—this was different. This was beyond human endurance.

My GoCam was still recording, its little green light a steady pulse against the overwhelming orange-gold of this alien desert. Would anyone ever see the footage? Would anyone even look for me when I didn't return?

I had no family waiting for my call. No boyfriend expecting me home. Just an editor who'd want to know why I'd missed my deadline, and podcast listeners who would assume I'd finally given up the ghost-hunting gig.

I collapsed to my knees. Then to my side.

The sand burned through my clothes, scorching my skin, but I couldn't find the strength to move. My heart pounded too fast, then too slow. The world tilted and spun around me, my vision narrowing to a pinprick of consciousness.

And just before darkness swallowed me whole, I saw them.

A pair of eyes—gold, slitted, glowing with something wild and hungry—appearing like twin stars through the haze.

They floated above me, disembodied in my fading vision, before resolving into a face

that wasn't human.

Couldn't be human. The angles were wrong, the proportions alien, the skin a burnished copper that reflected the twin suns like metal.

The creature—the person—whatever it was—tilted its head, studying me with predatory intensity. Its mouth moved, forming words I couldn't hear over the rushing in my ears.

I tried to speak. To move. To do anything but lie there dying on alien sand under alien suns.

But my body had reached its limit.

And then everything went black.

Ready to meet the alien warrior who finds her?

Download *Deserted* and prepare to fall hard for Rhaekar Onca of House Acinonyx.

Look for *Deserted* , available June 20, 2025

(High heat. Fated mates. Grumpy alien sand daddy. You've been warned.)